

A
TREATISE
OF THE
Causes of Incredulity.

Wherein are examin'd the general Motives and Occasions which dispose Unbelievers to reject the Christian Religion.

WITH

Two LETTERS, containing a direct Proof of the Truth of Christianity.

Translated from the French of
Monsieur LE CLERC.

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TREATISE

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The Translator's PREFACE.

MR. Le Clerc is a Person so well known to all the learned World, that it could not be thought less arrogant than superfluous for me to give any Character of his Capacity or his Writings. Nor can it be said that I transgress either way in recommending the following Treatise ; for, setting aside all personal Considerations, the Subject of it is enough to justify my Undertaking. The Study of Religion in general is so natural to Man, that some would make this Inclination to pass for the only essential Distinction of our Species from all other Animals. But the Study of the true Religion must needs be of the highest Importance, since the Profession of it is not acknowledg'd to be more necessary, than the Sects pretending themselves to be the only Persons enjoying that Happiness, are found to be different from one another in their Opinions and Practices. This Diversity join'd to the great number of Parties that lay their Claim to genuine Christianity exclusively of all the rest, seems to render the Discovery of the Truth very difficult, if not impossible : And indeed thousands of well-meaning People have upon this very account given up themselves to Scepticism and Indifference in Matters of Religion ; or, which is as bad, are content to be implicitly led by their Teachers. Now that Person deserves best of the World who not only makes the Truth plain and intelligible, separating it from all the false Notions with which it is so mix'd and over-run sometimes as to endanger the entire Ruin thereof ; but who likewise establishes such an excellent Method

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that a Man may be most certain he's on the right side, without being oblig'd to undergo the endless Labour of examining every Religion successively. How far our Author has contributed to do Mankind this desirable piece of Service, the Reader must determine; for we pretend not to lead his Judgment. And tho Mr. Le Clerc is so modest as to think his own Performance inferiour to that of Grotius upon the same Subject, I must affirm, (and that with all imaginable Impartiality) that in my Opinion there is no Comparison to be made between them; for were it for nothing else but that the Evidence of Mr. Le Clerc's Reasons is obvious to Men of all Conditions, whereas most of the other's Book is not intelligible but to profound Scholars, (as if these only had a Right to the Privilege of understanding the Grounds of their Religion) this alone is sufficient to decide the Controversy. But what is more, notwithstanding the extraordinary Talents of Grotius, he was not near so great a Master of the Oriental Languages, nor so acute and solid a Philosopher; nor yet superiour in Philology or History; to speak nothing of the Advantages of writing after him. But let Mr. Le Clerc's Book speak for its Author. As for my Version, I shan't detain the Reader with any Apology, because it is not more correct or polite, if it be faithful and intelligible, which is all that is necessary for those who sincerely study for Truth: and if I be so happy as to satisfy them, I care not much for the Displeasure of others.

To the READER.

'**T**IS some Years since I first form'd a Design of writing upon the Subject of this small Piece, which I publish at present ; and had my other Occupations purely depended upon my own Choice, this had been perform'd long ago : but being necessarily engag'd in some other things, I was forc'd to put it off till now. At length having finish'd my Latin Writings upon the Pentateuch, I happily became Master of Time enough to turn my Applications upon this Subject. I can freely say, that I never thought of Matters of this nature without extreme Satisfaction ; for, after what manner soever I could consider the Christian Religion, it always appear'd to me grounded upon the firmest Proofs, and the Doctrines of it perfectly conformable to sound Reason, or (to say all in one word) worthy the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Nor did I in my whole Life labour with more ardour and delight than I did in composing this Work, wherein I have,

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I think, evidently made out that Unbelievers act against all good Sense in refusing their Assent to the Gospel: and I perswade my self, that if they consider the same things that I have, they must necessarily acknowledg the Truth of it. But whether I'm mistaken or not, that the World shall judg. If this Book have the good luck to meet with that Reception in French, which several others of this kind have had, I may one time or other put it into Latin; and in my Annotations upon it confirm all that I say by the Authority of the most antient Apologists of Christianity, and that too of the most considering Heathens; as the incomparable *Grotius* has done in his Books of the Truth of the Christian Religion. I'm far indeed from equalling my Work to his, nor do I flatter my self with the same Success, as to the Judgment of the publick: but if Men had regard only to the Intentions of those that write, I think I may safely say that none in the World had better than mine, nor was more convinc'd of the Goodness of that Cause I have undertaken to defend.

John Le Clerc.

OF
INCREDULITY.

The PREFACE,
Containing the Design of the
Author in this Work.

I Cannot determine whether, during the first Ages of Christianity, more Books were written by the Christians to evince the Truth of their Religion, than there may have been for these two hundred Years past. But that we have fewer remaining of the precedent Ages than of the last two, is most certain. The Teachers of the Primitive Church and their Followers, whilst Paganism was still considerable in the World, labour'd more in confuting the Religion of the Heathens, than to prove the Truth of that of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. They thought if they could once convince the Heathens of the Falsity of their own Opinions, that it would be no hard Matter then to make 'em Christians.

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And this I could most easily shew, were it at all useful to my Design.

On the contrary, when Paganism was abolish'd in Europe, and Christianity become the governing Religion, the Teachers of it then left Paganism to attack the Religion of the Jews, and that of the Mahumetans, both which are yet in being amongst us. But, beside these two sorts of Unbelievers, there is yet a third, who, acknowledging the Falsity of the Mahumetan and Rabbinic Doctrines, doubt notwithstanding of the Christian Religion, or peremptorily judg it not true, without setting up any other Religion in its Place. Now to reduce these, a new Method was absolutely necessary. It was agreed therefore to prove directly the Truth of Christianity, without insisting upon the Confutation of other Perswasions. And it may truly be said, to the Honour of the present Age, and of that immediately preceding it, that this Matter was never manag'd with better Success. The Heathens, the Jews, and the Mahumetans were not ill confuted before, but the Truth of the Christian Religion was far from being ever so well prov'd.

I am of Opinion nevertheless, that there is still one thing behind, which the most part of the Writers upon this Subject have either not touch'd at all, or but very slightly; I mean, the secret Motives and general Reasons which the Incredulous have of not believing Christianity to be divinely reveal'd.

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Their internal Disposition or Inclinations do so strongly incline them to reject all the Reasons offer'd them, (tho they are not aware themselves of the Motives by which they do this) that all speaking to 'em is in vain, before the Unreasonableness of this Disposition be made evident. Just as if any should plead a good Cause before prepossess'd Judges, without endeavouring to cure them first of their Prejudices, which must needs make them look upon that thing as false, whereupon all the Reasons alledg'd are grounded. 'Tis certain, that the Pleaders of such a Cause, tho never so just, would expose themselves to be cast or condemn'd. This has been notwithstanding the Conduct of a great Part of the Champions of Christianity. They have prov'd the Truth of it well enough, but their Reasons appear weak to the Incredulous, considering the Disposition wherein they are, and whereof they know nothing themselves. What is unreasonable therefore in this Disposition must be discover'd, and laid so clearly before them, that they may perceive how it imposes upon the Light of their Understandings.

This is what the Author of the Christian Religion has taught us, when he said, that every one that doth Evil hateth the Light, Joh. 3. 20: neither cometh to the Light, lest his Deeds should be reprov'd: which signifies that Unbelievers cannot look upon that as true which is contrary to the Maxims by which they have long govern'd themselves, and to the

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Habits they have been contracting for many Years. On the contrary he says, that he
 Ver. 21. *that doth Truth cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifest: that is to say, that such as are dispos'd to live according to the Prescriptions of the Gospel, are easily perswaded of the Truth of it. In the same Sense he says elsewhere, that if any will*
 Joh. 7. 17. *do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God, or whether of himself.*

Beside the Disposition wherein those may be who disbelieve the Gospel, and which deceives them without their perceiving of it, there are likewise certain general Reasons drawn from without that help to lead them into Error. These Reasons must by all means be exploded, because they are to them so many Prejudices whereby they determine the Truth and Falseness of all that is said to them. Whilst they think 'em good, all the Proofs imaginable can make no Impression upon them; because they never fail of opposing to them these Reasons, which concluding to be solid, they cannot at the same time embrace Christianity.

There are a world of People, for example, who, discovering several of those Doctrines that go under the Name of Christ to be false, judg of the rest by these, and reject the good with the bad. They are told of a thousand lying Miracles, to whom those of Jesus Christ and his Apostles are join'd: but finding the modern Miracles to be Impostures, they give

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no greater Credit to those upon which the Christian Religion is grounded.

As long as they are of the mind that these Miracles are not more certain one than another, all the Consequences drawn from those of Christ appear to them as built upon a rotten Foundation, and the Christian Religion therefore but as a tottering Fabrick. It must be shewn the Incredible then, that those Reasons drawn from without which induce them to reject the Gospel, have no Solidity in them: and after this it may be hop'd that the Proofs of its Truth may have some Effect upon their Minds.

I design to proceed according to this Method in the present Discourse, where, after having examin'd the inward Disposition of Unbelievers, and also shewing the Unreasonableness of it, I shall discover the Weakness of those Arguments drawn from without, by which they judg of the Christian Religion.

Before I begin I must once more advertise my Reader, that the Unbelievers which I attack are neither the Jews nor the Mahumetans, but those, who, making an outward Profession of the Christian Religion, conceal in the mean time their real Thoughts from the World; but when they think to do it without

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Danger, they declare to their Friends in private, that they believe not the Truth of it. Not but that the Pagans, Jews, and Mahumetans are frequently guilty of the same Faults with those Unbelievers whereof I treat ; but it would be Labour in vain to trouble our selves with such as never read the Writings of the Christians ; and who, because of their Prejudices, are in a manner incapable of reasoning rightly. I write merely for the sake of those Unbelievers among Christians into whose Hands this Book is like to come, or for such as may happen to be seduc'd by their Reasons.

Beside this sort of Unbelievers, that commonly reject whatever is said to be reveal'd, there is yet another kind of Men infinitely more numerous, who are Unbelievers by halves, and to whom many things in this Work may be properly apply'd. These own in general, that the Gospel is true, but will be sure to admit of no Particular therein that is absolutely incompatible with their own Inclinations or Habits. Such Doctrines they cannot persuade themselves to be Evangelick, which is almost the same thing as if they rejected half the New Testament, or rather entirely renounc'd it ; seeing that Jesus Christ will not have the Heart to be thus divided between himself and the World.

Whilst

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Whilst I prove against them who reject all the Christian Religion, that their Dispositions or Inclinations cannot be the Rule of Truth and Falshood, I shew to those half-Unbelievers, that they grossly impose upon themselves in receiving nothing of the Gospel, but only what serves their turn.

Finally, I don't pretend to have exhausted the Subject I treat of. An infinite Number of Cases or Questions may be rais'd about Matters of this nature, without any possibility of examining them all. And there may be, I deny not, even some general Maxims forgotten by me, which cannot be commodiously reduc'd to those I have laid down, worthy nevertheless to be discuss'd, and serviceable to my Design. But this others may do, if they think fit; or I may do it one day myself, if I should ever enlarge this Work.

I have purposely said in the Title-Page, that I examin'd the general Reasons of Unbelievers, that the Answers to many particular Objections they are wont to make may not be expected in this Book. They must be look'd after in Systems of Theology, or in the Commentators upon the Holy Scripture. But I'll presume to say, that these particular Objections are to be little fear'd, when once all general Difficulties are remov'd out of the

Understanding, because the same Principles that answer the one, may serve to solve the other ; or, at least, prevent their having any ill Effect, if they cannot be answer'd ; as it may be seen in the second Part of this Discourse.

PART

PART I.

Of the Motives of Incredulity which spring from the inward Disposition or Inclinations of Unbelievers.

CHAP. I.

That it is unreasonable and unjust to reject the Christian Religion, because it is contrary to the Dispositions a Man finds in himself.

HAD Men been pure Intelligences, solely applying themselves to the Search of Truth and Falshood, dispos'd to regulate their Lives according to the Discoveries they should make, and all this without causing to them any Pain or Trouble; there could be no other thing needful, than to cure them of their Errors, or to reform their Conduct, but only to demonstrate those Truths to them whereof they

they were ignorant before, and to shew that they liv'd not accordingly. But the Judgments which Men form of most Things, depend as much upon the Habits they have contracted, and which they cannot easily correct, as upon the Light of their Understanding, and Ratiocinations. Such as are accustom'd, for Example, to live idly, never thinking of any thing that is useful, and that can thus pass away their Time without any Apprehensions of Poverty; these, I say, look upon all Reasons offer'd for Pains-taking or Study, to be only the Discourses of morose People, who are Strangers to the Enjoyments of Life. The strongest Arguments to prove that every one is oblig'd to be some way useful to the Society whereof he's a Member, appear to such without any Foundation; tho others judg 'em demonstrative. But how comes this to pass? 'Tis because the Habit they have got of living in Idleness, keeps them from attentively considering what is said; for they fix their Thoughts upon quite contrary Idea's, the Remembrance whereof is at the same time very grateful to them. They think upon that soft Indolency, and that pleasing Laziness, wherein they spent the best of their days without any Chagrin; and their Minds are so taken up with these Contemplations, that there is no room left for any thing less agreeable.

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As much may be said of all good and ill Habits of a long continuance, as it must be granted by all that are capable of making the least Reflection; and this Truth every Person has learn'd a thousand times from Experience, or may do it when he will.

Some body, perhaps, that has not sufficiently study'd the Heart of Man, will be apt to say, that when a Habit is found to be evil, it ought to be presently chang'd into a good one. This is indeed most easily said, but nothing more difficult to practise. When a Man is us'd to a certain manner of Living and Thinking, it must be own'd that he takes Pleasure in it; for this is the necessary effect of all Habits: Now when once a thing is accompany'd with Pleasure, we cannot forbear loving it; and whilst we thus love it, there is no leaving of it without great Strugglings, and putting an extreme Violence upon our Inclinations.

As the Habits we already have, were contracted by degrees; so a great deal of time is requisite to acquire others: for as there is need of Time to destroy an old Habit, so there is likewise to form a new one. For if to be undeceiv'd in any thing, it were only necessary to listen like pure Spirits, we should in one quarter of an Hour run from one Extreme to the other. Nothing makes Time necessary in
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order to become Vertuous, but because we are unwilling to be so: and did we desire it, we should quickly learn to live honestly and happily. *Longam facit operam, quod repugnamus: Brevis est institutio vitæ honestæ beatæque, si credas.* Quintil. Inst. Orat. lib. 12. c. 6.

Should it happen then that we had Habits quite contrary to such as the Christian Religion requires of Men, they would certainly dispose us to look upon every thing which that Religion does teach to be false, and to refuse Submission to its Laws. I don't say yet, that those contrary Dispositions to the Gospel are good or bad; but I desire only the Supposition which I now made to be granted me: and I think none can deny me this, without denying at the same time what I laid down at the Beginning, concerning the Influence our Habits have over our Reason, with the Difficulty of conquering them. But these are Truths so evident to all the World, that there's no Possibility of disagreeing from them.

This being so, behold the Picture of Man that rejects the Christian Religion because it is contrary to his present Disposition, however he came by it. He's a Man that says to himself, All that is taught by this Religion is false, because it is repugnant to my Condition. I'm too honest a Man to deserve Damnation; but this

this must nevertheless be, were the Christian Religion true: It is therefore false, and I shall never believe it.

'Tis absurd, some will say, to suppose a Man's Disposition to be good, without any other Proof, but that to believe the contrary is a troublesome thing, and that one is oblig'd to condemn himself. No body, say they, can reason after this manner, unless it be some Fool. I grant it; but there are many more Fools of this sort than we imagine. Such as believe their own Sentiments to be the only true ones in the World, (and these are almost all Mankind) what Judgment do they make of those, who, without examining, reject them? Do they not conclude, that such as act in that manner, being well pleas'd with their own Condition, judg every thing true that agrees with it, and the contrary false?

'Tis true, nevertheless, that no body reasons formally so, distinctly considering every Proposition, and their Connection with one another. No Person makes this formal Paralogism: I'm an honest Man; what is contrary to the Idea's and the Conduct of an honest Man is false; therefore the Christian Religion, which is contrary to my Idea's and Conduct, is false. But 'tis certain, that the Mind supposing the two first Propositions without expressly reflecting upon them, does
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thence infer the mention'd Conclusion. We pass over the Premises so quickly, that we perceive not whence the Conclusion is drawn ; only we find our selves strongly perswaded of its Truth.

Let us imagine that we understand the Language of the Cannibals, and that we preach to them this Maxim, receiv'd by almost all Nations, That to fatten Men, in order to eat them, is a horrible thing. Can we believe that they would immediately agree to it ? that they would detest their former Customs, and live ever afterwards as we do ? 'Tis plain, that they would resist the Truth we should preach to them, as long a time as other Nations do all Sentiments contrary to their own. But what Reason can they pretend for this abominable manner of living ? None at all, except what I have now mention'd. And 'tis so with all those whose Passions will not permit 'em to renounce their Errors : For neither the Atrocity of the Crime, nor the Grossness of the Mistake, will cause any Change in their Conduct.

Were any body assur'd that his Disposition was good and conformable to Reason ; that is, if he had clear and evident Proofs that he was what he really ought to be, and that he could not change into better ; he might then justly conclude, That any Doctrine repugnant to his Disposition

position must be false. Knowing, for Example, as we do, that it is a horrible thing to eat one another ; if any notwithstanding should persuade us to eat a Man, we might reasonably do all that the Horror of such an Action could dictate to us. Before we follow therefore the Inclinations which Custom begets in us, we ought to be fully convinc'd by clear and indubitable Reasons, that such a Custom is well grounded.

And if the Unbelievers who reject the Christian Religion because it is contrary to their Passions, had good Reasons to believe those Passions lawful, we could not reproach them with their Infidelity. But if, on the contrary, we can shew that these Passions are blameable, and contrary to the Light of Reason, 'tis certain they ought to acknowledg themselves in the wrong, and we might justly complain of their Obstinacy.

I don't know how these Maxims can be contested, seeing they are founded upon the Evidence of common Sense. It may be said, perhaps, that, without so many Preambles, I should have come directly to the Point, and shew that Unbelievers refuse Assent to the Gospel from ill-grounded Prejudices. But I thought it necessary that the Principles whence I draw the following Consequences, should be seriously consider'd.

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As those who reason from their present Disposition, do it without thinking on't, I take it for granted, that the greatest part of Unbelievers commit the same Fault; and I beg of them to retire, as it were, into themselves, there to examine all the Principles by which they have determin'd not to believe the Truth of the Christian Religion.

Seeing the Morals of it are opposite to all the Vices that Reason condemns, it is impossible that any should reject it, without finding himself engag'd in some of these Vices: For why should any reject as false what is conformable to Reason, except it be that he's in a Disposition contrary to this same Reason? Although 'tis not always perceiv'd, it follows not that the thing is otherwise. It merits therefore some Attention.

The Morals of the Gospel are reduc'd, according to the Expression of one of Christ's Apostles, to live Temperately, Justly, and Piously. Temperance comprehends all the Vertues which regard our Selves; Justice them that concern our Neighbour; and Piety those which relate to God. Our own Good requires us to live temperately, as the Heathen Philosophers have demonstrated: Now Temperance consists in a moderate Desire of Honours, Riches, and Pleasures. We should not court Honours but by lawful ways,

ways, not as a means to live great, but to be useful to the Society wherein we live. And this cannot be, except we are capable of duly discharging those Offices which we seek, and of using those Honours we are ambitious of, to good purpose. As for Riches, the Gospel forbids us to desire 'em as a Good ; but if, without breach of any Christian Vertue, we become rich, it commands us, not to deprive our selves of what is necessary, but to impart our Superfluities to the Needy. And as to Pleasures, we may take none but such as are not contrary to any Duty the Gospel enjoins, and in such a measure as will not engage us to violate any of its Laws. Thus the Gospel will have us to sacrifice all our Pleasures to what it ordains us, and that we resolve upon suffering all sorts of Evils, rather than neglect one of its Commands. These are the principal Duties very near, that regard our selves : for I design not to make here a complete Abridgement of the Christian Morals : for my Subject does not require it ; and it suffices that I bring to mind the chief Heads of them.

The Justice which the Gospel recommends to us, does contain two things : One is, to render every one his Due ; and this is what the Heathens themselves call'd *Justice*. The other is, to do for our Neighbour all that we would wish him to

do for us were we in his Condition : that we should pardon him, for Example, when he does us wrong, rather than to revenge it ; and help him in all that we can, and that is no way contrary to the Precepts of the Gospel. The Civil Laws may compel us, in part at least, to render every Man his Due, and they are establish'd for this purpose ; but nothing can oblige us to do more, except the Desire of living conformable to the Christian Morals. The Heathens themselves have acknowledg'd, that to be good Men there was need of a great deal more than the Civil Laws requir'd. What a poor Virtue is it, says a Philosopher, to be only good according to the Laws ? How much larger is the Rule of the Duties we are oblig'd to, than that of the Law ? How many things are requir'd by Piety, Humanity, Justice, Liberality, and Fidelity, that are not express'd in the publick Records ? *Quam angusta innocentia est ad legem bonum esse ? Quanto latius patet officiorum, quam juris regula ? Quam multa pietas, humanitas, liberalitas, justitia, fides exigunt, quæ omnia extra publicas tabulas sunt ?*

As it would be impossible to fulfil these Duties upon all sorts of Occasions, especially when the Observation of them should endanger Reputation, Goods, or Life, if there were no Reward to be expected in this Life nor after Death by such as liv'd
according

according to the Gospel ; so God has promis'd to protect good Men here as far as should be needful for them, and to render them eternally happy hereafter. To believe these Promises, and to have that Gratitude for the Divinity which his Goodness requires of us, is what the Gospel calls Piety.

This is an Abridgment of the Morals of Jesus Christ, and which no body can reject, but because he's not dispos'd to live accordingly ; as I'm going to shew by some Examples.

When Jesus Christ and his Apostles began to preach the Gospel, few Persons of Quality, or that pretended to considerable Employments, embrac'd it, as we learn it from themselves. At this day such as doubt of the Truth of Christianity, or are resolv'd to believe it false, are frequently Men of the same Rank. All that are acquainted with the World know very well, that the common People, and those that have no aspiring Thoughts, are more rarely troubl'd with Incredulity or Doubts than Persons of Quality, and those who pretend to great Preferments, or think themselves worthy of such.

If we look for the Reasons of this in the Persons themselves, we shall not find that the Ambitious do reason better than others, or discover Defects in Christiani-

ty unknown to the rest of the World. On the contrary, such as think of nothing but advancing themselves, do not commonly study much in the Gospel; and as they are ignorant of the Beauties of it, they could not be more capable than others to find out the Weakness of it if it had any. All the Knowledg they possess above the rest of Men, is only the Art of so governing themselves in the World as to come at their Ends.

The true Reason why they doubt, or that throws them into Incredulity, is nothing else but their predominant Passion Ambition, which is too opposite to the Morals of the Gospel, to lodg in any Heart throughly perswaded of its Truth, or touch'd by its Maxims. Let us suppose a Man very desirous to possess a considerable Charge without having fit Talents for it; or if he has, that he designs not to serve his Country by his Place, but only to live splendidly and luxuriously: we may suppose farther, that he makes use of all Tricks to obtain it, and that he's ready to do any thing sooner than miss of it. This Passion which entirely takes him up, and fills his whole Imagination with the Pleasure that accompanies all his Desires, makes him look upon his own Conduct as the most reasonable and the most innocent in the World. If a Man in this Disposition hears of the Gospel (the first time we
may

may suppose) and be told what Christ said of Ambition, can any wonder if he rejects it, or is the Reason of it hard to be guess'd?

Notwithstanding, it were easy to shew that what the Gospel teaches concerning Ambition is conformable to the clearest Evidence of good Sense, and that many Pagan Philosophers have taught it likewise. If the Disposition therefore of an ambitious Man determines him to disbelieve the Gospel, he must own at the same time, that he acts contrary to the clearest Light of Reason.

The same Reasoning may be properly made concerning the avaritious, the voluptuous, the unjust, the vindictive Man, and all others that are engag'd in Habits opposite to the Gospel. A certain *Portuguese* call'd *Uriel Acosta*, who turn'd Jew, and fell into Sadducism, could not digest that Precept of the Gospel, viz. to love our Enemies; because being naturally revengeful, and having been ill us'd by the Jews of *Amsterdam*, he could never find in his Heart to forgive them. He concluded therefore, that the Practice of this Command being impossible, it was in vain to give it to Men, and could not believe that God had reveal'd it.

'Tis true, that a Man extremely vindictive, and for many Years indulging himself in this Passion, cannot, without a

Miracle, be brought of a sudden to pardon, or patiently to suffer Injuries. In this Disposition he's always sure to reject the Gospel, by reason of this one Precept, or at least to refuse Submission to this Article, supposing that the rest are not too repugnant to his Inclinations. But if in those Intervals wherein his Revenge is as it were suspended a while, he comes to consider the fatal Effects of this Passion, which would engage Men, if they always obey'd it, in perpetual Wars and Quarrels that could never terminate but in the Death of one or both the Persons; he must acknowledg that Revenge is a most dangerous Passion, and that one or the other had better forgive his Enemy, or rather to pardon one another, so to put an end to their mutual Injuries. He will wish, it may be, that his Enemies would entertain the same Consideration, and cast off this Spirit of Vengeance, being ready to do as much on his side. The more this Thought comes into his Mind, the more reasonable it will appear to him, and the more conformable to the true Interests of Mankind. By little and little will the Desire of seeing his Enemies cur'd of so great an Imperfection increase; and he will insensibly rid himself of it, to shew them a good Example. At length, instead of longing to revenge himself upon his Enemies, instead of making Im-
pre-

precations against them, he'll ardently wish they may become better Men; and will beg it of God in his Prayers. Nay, he'll on his side, as much as possible, contribute towards it, and after praying God, as he do's for himself, that his Enemies may become more vertuous, he'll wish 'em all that God is wont to bestow and more, as much as he would desire it for himself. Now, this it is to *love our Enemies*, for we cannot love them above our selves, and the Gospel requires no more.

It will be granted that these Thoughts are most reasonable, and that it were to be wish'd all Mankind had the like Idea's. And as Men so dispos'd would very easily comprehend the Possibility of loving our Enemies, they would be far from doubting of the Truth of Christianity upon the score of this Precept.

All that can be said to this, is, that those who reject the Religion of Christ, do it not upon the Account of its Morals, which are beyond Contradiction very good, and grounded upon the clearest Light of Reason; but because it contains, in their Opinion, incredible Mysteries, and supposes Miracles that have no Probability.

Two things we must remark then, that we may know whether the Difficulty they pretend of believing the Mysteries and Miracles of Religion, or whether the Dis-

like of its moral Precepts, is the true Cause of their Incredulity. The first is, if they don't believe many things as incomprehensible or perplex'd: And the second, if the Maxims of their Morals be as reasonable as those of the Gospel, or if they be not plainly opposite to it. If it happens that upon all other Accounts they readily believe things they do not comprehend, and that the Rules of their Conduct be more than the Gospel admits, do they not give us just Occasion to suspect that their ill Habits are the secret, but true Cause of their Disbelief of the Gospel, whatever they pretend?

There is nothing so common as to see Unbelievers strongly perswaded of Judiciary Astrology, and believing that Magicians can do several things beyond the Power and Order of Nature. Two great Ministers of State, for example, whose Actions will not let us think that Religion was one of their greatest Vertues, are both accus'd of believing the Predictions of Astrologers: and one of them of perswading himself that a Man who vomited several sorts of Liquors, did it by the Help of Magick. Cardinal Richlieu, says an Historian, consulted, besides Astrology, all kinds of Divination, even silly Women, whose Knowledg consists in Vapours that make 'em foretel by chance some fortuitous Events. He was so credulous

dulous as to attribute to the Operation of the Devil the Art of throwing out at the Mouth all sorts of Liquors, after having first drunk Water, as was done by an Italian Mountebank. *Mazarin*, who was not yet a Cardinal, having at so simple a Discourse burst out a laughing, had like to lose his Favour by it: for the Cardinal being provok'd at this Mirth, whereby he thought *Mazarin* jeer'd him, said ironically to him, that he was not Monsieur *Mazarin* who had a profound and exact Knowledge of every thing. *Mazarin* very submissively reply'd, that giving the fifty Pistols which the Mountebank demanded for teaching his Secret, it might be seen whether the Devil had any hand in't. *Mazarin* himself look'd upon all Divinations as Fopperies, except Astrology, which he strongly fancy'd, tho he feign'd the contrary. When Madam *Mancini* his Sister dy'd, and afterwards the Dutchess of *Mercaur* his Niece, according to the Prediction of an Astrologer, at Rome, given in Writing a great while before, he became extraordinary sad and melancholy, not out of Tenderness to his Relations, but because this same Astrologer had fix'd the Term of his own Death to a Time that was very near. He lost his Appetite upon it, and slept not for many Nights, &c.

'Tis also known, that the Emperor *Julian*, who could not believe the Prophecies of the Old and New Testament, was extremely addicted to the Auguries and Presages drawn from the Intrals of Victims, and the Heathens themselves have blam'd him for it.

I take it for granted, that such things as these are as hard to be credited, consider'd in themselves, as the Mysteries and Miracles of the Christian Religion. But the Incredulous believe them at the same time that they refuse their Assent to the Gospel; because these Opinions do not regard the manner of any Person's living, and are not at all incompatible, as the Christian Morals are, with their ill Habits.

Moreover, if the Unbelievers would strictly examine themselves, and compare their Conduct with that which the Gospel prescribes, I'll own my self much deceiv'd if they find it Proof against the Rigour of its Precepts. *Julian*, of whom I was speaking, had many excellent Qualities which he needed not to quit by any means, had he remain'd still a Christian; and several bad ones he had likewise, which he must have rid himself of, would he follow the Morals of the Gospel. At least, it is certain that he could not be so injurious to the Christians as he was, which appears by many of his Letters.

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From all this I conclude, that notwithstanding whatever can be said, the Disposition of a Person does exceedingly contribute to make him receive or reject Christianity; and that Unbelievers ought to examine themselves hereupon, to see whether this, whereof we accuse them, be not true.

C H A P. II.

That Pride may be the Cause why Assent is not granted to the Proofs of the Truth of the Christian Religion.

PRide is inconsistent with a strong and lively Perswasion that Christianity is true; not only because the Gospel condemns it, as it does all other Passions contrary to the Good of Mankind, but also because those affected with it find themselves dispos'd by a particular Effect of this Vice to reject unexamined the Proofs alledg'd for the Truth of the Gospel. This is what I design to shew, after I have first describ'd Pride and its contrary Vertue Humility, lest what I am to say concerning it should not be so well understood.

Pride is no other thing but a Disposition of Mind that makes a Man imagine he possesses

esses more Knowledg, Endowments or Vertues than he truly does; and that by Consequence he should be more honour'd and esteem'd than he deserves. The Proud cannot without Vexation bear that the one or the other should be deny'd to them, especially if they are not refus'd to other Persons. They have not only a high Idea of themselves, but likewise despise others, who, they are easily perswaded, have not the same good Qualities, nor any thing worthy of that Esteem which they pretend to be their own due. The too good Opinion any conceives of himself, is ever accompany'd with a Contempt of others, and both the one and the other are equally apparent outwardly. Those who suffer themselves to be blinded with this Passion, believe not only that there are no good Qualities except in their own Persons, and in such as admire them; but they also abhor all that to them appears ordinary, and think they should debase themselves, had they any Thoughts that were common to several others.

Such were, for example, the antient Stoicks, who imagin'd they had more Knowledg than all the World besides, and that they were above those Weaknesses remarkable in other Men. They look'd upon those with Scorn and Pity (if their Principles would permit 'em to have any) who were not perswaded of their Doctrines.

Strines. They troubl'd themselves little with the Sentiments of others which they consider'd as idle Dreams, and never spoke of the most ordinary things but in strange Terms. Pain was not an Evil, Pleasure was not a Good, all Vertues were equal, there was no Difference between Vices; their Sage only had common Sense, all others were Fools. They utter'd a thousand Paradoxes of this Nature, only to distinguish themselves from the Vulgar, who have Ideas very opposite to these.

On the contrary *Humility*, which is the same Vertue the Heathens call'd *Modesty*, consists in having no other Sentiments of our selves but what are proportion'd to our good Qualities, and not to pretend to Honours that are not due to us. Nay, this Vertue goes yet further, and those whom we may call humble patiently suffer themselves to be debas'd much below their Merit. As those who have this Vertue esteem not themselves more than they ought, so they are far from despising others, and willing to do them all the Justice they can reasonably wish. Nor are they vex'd to see People that are their Inferiours in many respects exalted above them, and more consider'd than they deserve.

This Vertue may be remarkably seen in the Primitive Christians, who perfectly knowing the Errors of the Heathens, and
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the Defects of their Philosophy, did not reject however all that it taught, to distinguish themselves from the Pagan Philosophers. On the contrary, they readily approv'd all that was good in it, and were transported to discover a Conformity between the Notions of those Sages admir'd by the Multitude, and the Doctrines of the Gospel. They even confess'd with great Sincerity, that the Heathen Authors did much surpass in Eloquence the first Writers of the Christian Religion. *Clement Alexandrinus* in his *Stromates*, and *Eusebius* in his *Evangelick Preparation*, can furnish a thousand Proofs of it; as well as many other Ecclesiastical Authors whom I need not cite.

Such therefore as reject Sentiments generally receiv'd, or at least receiv'd by a great Number of Persons, should take care that the Love of Singularity, rather than a Demonstration that others are mistaken, has made them quit the beaten Road. 'Tis true indeed that the Multitude of those who embrace a certain Opinion, is not a good Proof of the Truth of it; but on the other hand it is no cogent Argument that a thing is false, because many People believe it.

It is certain notwithstanding, that to be distinguish'd from the Croud, a Man frequently rejects what he believes true, for no other Reason, but because it is a vulgar

gar Notion. A vain Spirit cannot bear that he should be equall'd in any thing to an infinite number of Persons whose Knowledge he believes interiour to his own, and whose mean Inclinations aim at nothing but what is common.

I'm perswaded that several are Unbelievers, because at least the fundamental Doctrines of Christianity are extremely common. They think it noble to be undeceiv'd concerning vulgar Opinions, and to look upon others as People that feed themselves upon Chimera's. A Man thus conceited of himself, thinks he's elevated far above the credulous Multitude, which is led rather by Custom, than guided by Reason. "There is nothing so pleasant, says an Epicurean Poet, as to live in the exalted Temple of Wisdom, where you may enjoy a perpetual Calm, and whence you may look down upon other Men wandering and scatter'd in their different ways of living.

—*Nil dulcius est bene quam munita tenere
Edita doctrinâ sapientum templa serena;
Despicere unde queas alios, passimq; videre
Errare, atq; viam palantes quærere vitæ.*

But at bottom, one exposes himself, as I have said already, as much to Deception by contemning whatever the Vulgar esteems, for no other Reason than this;

as

as by blindly embracing all that the Multitude authorizes. Neither its Approbation nor its Hatred are the proper marks of Truth or Falshood. If there have been Chimera's generally receiv'd, there have been also as many ridiculous Notions countenanc'd by a small number of People who imagin'd themselves more knowing than others. Therefore when any finds himself inclin'd to forsake vulgar Sentiments, he ought to take heed that he be not impos'd upon by the agreeable Thoughts of being exempted from those Errors wherein he sees others engag'd. This may be as well the Delusion of a secret Pride, as the Effect of uncommon Knowledg.

It is by so much the more dangerous to fall out of Vanity into any singular Thoughts, as that when once a Man is govern'd by this Principle, it is the hardest thing in the World to make him change his Mind. The same Passion that leads him into it, confirms him in it insensibly, by reason of the Pleasure wherewith it fills those who will be blinded by it, representing them, as I said, to themselves as Persons highly elevated above the Vulgar. Beside all this, vain People imagining they are more clear-sighted than others, easily believe themselves never mistaken, and that the rest of Men have not the necessary Sagacity for discovering the Truth.

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This is the reason that when any, where-
of they have not so good an Opinion as of
themselves, proposes to them Sentiments
contrary to their own, they will not so
much as give him the Hearing. The first
Thought that offers it self then to their
Minds, or, if you please, the Sentiment
that is awak'd in their Heart, is, that if
this Man spoke the Truth, it would follow
that a Person whom they despise, and not,
as they think, without Reason, should
have more Penetration and a sounder
Judgment than themselves. But this is
what they can never agree to ; for so
they must entirely change the pleasing
Idea they hitherto entertain'd of them-
selves and others. They would be oblig'd
to allow those whom they always believ'd
much their Inferiours, a more considera-
ble Rank in their Esteem than themselves,
and, in certain Regards, acknowledg their
Superiority.

I shall illustrate this Truth by some Ex-
amples. Let's take a Jewish Doctor, and,
if you will, of the Sacerdotal Race. Sup-
pose him to have studied the Laws of *Mo-*
ses with great Application, and the Tra-
ditions currant among the Jews in the
Apostles time. Add likewise, that he
succeeded well enough in this Study, ac-
cording to the Notion Men had of it then ;
that he thereby acquir'd a great Reputati-

on amongst the most considerable of his Nation; and had been preferr'd to the greatest Honours they could confer upon him. A Man in these Circumstances might very easily conceive a good Opinion of his own Person and Understanding, and consequently despise such as were destitute of those things which procur'd him all that Honour and Esteem.

Now let us suppose, that one of the common People, not of the Priestly Stock, neither skill'd in the Law, nor of any Esteem in the World, goes to see this eminent Priest, and tells him of things directly contrary to his Sentiments; maintains against him, for instance, That the best part of the Traditions he had learn'd were contrary to the true Sense of the Law, and that a Man may be acceptable to God without observing any of the Mo-faick Ceremonies. Now what would the Priest, think you, answer to this? What Opinion would he have of a Person that should speak after this manner? 'Tis no difficult Business to guess, that he would treat this Man with Indignation and Contempt; a little of his Pity is the most he could expect. It is plain notwithstanding, that the Priest would be more deserving of this Treatment, whatever good Opinion he had of himself.

To set the Effects of Pride in another Light, let us imagine an Epicurean Philosopher,

losopher, a Man of Parts, and that by his Writings and Discourses had got himself a considerable Reputation amongst the Greeks, such as *Lucian* was for Example, or any other that you please. This Man was accusom'd for a great while to laugh at the Heathen Religion, wherein, doubtless, he was not to blame; but he also join'd to it all other Religions, without examining them. He looks upon Religion in general as mere Superstition, or as a Trick of Politicians to impose upon the Simple. He has a hundred times declaim'd among his Friends against the Infatuation and Prejudices of Mankind in this respect; nor did he miss the Return of Applause from those of the same Disposition. His Friend's and his own Raileries against Religion have been a long time the best seasoning of their Conversation and Debauches.

Let us also send this Philosopher to some vulgar Person, who undertakes to prove against him, that his Epicureanism is the most absurd thing in the World; and endeavours to inspire him with some Awe of a Divinity, whose Providence governs the Universe. I desire not that this should be granted me as true or probable, but let us suppose it so a minute or two. Now, What will the Epicurean say? He'll presently put on a jeering Countenance, and laugh at all this

Man has said to him, without examining any part of it. And indeed, What Probability is there that a Person of Wit should condescend to learn of one who seems to have none, and who is infatuated to boot with the Opinions of the Mob?

These Examples belong properly to the Ages past; and to be sensible of their Force, we must, as it were, forget our own Time, and imagine our selves living before we had yet a Being. But such as have any Knowledge of Antiquity and the present Time, and have compar'd our Passions with those of our Predecessors, know that the Theatre of the World has only chang'd its Ornaments, and that the Heart of Man is the same now as heretofore.

Men are proud, as they have always been; and it must be granted, that this Passion may work the same Effect now, as it could have upon a Jewish Priest or Epicurean Philosopher sixteen hundred Years ago. We see every day, that a Man prejudic'd in favour of an Opinion, defends it out of Vanity, against the clearest Evidence of Reason. A Professor, for Instance, that in the University has long taught the old Philosophy or the old Physick, not only rejects the most ingenious and probable Conjectures of the Moderns, but even those Demonstrations which shew us the Errors of the Antients as plain as the

the Sun. The Reason of this Conduct is no other, but that if he acknowledg'd what the Moderns say to be true, he must at the same time own that he taught nothing for many Years but pure Chimera's: nor can he find in his heart to humble himself so much to others, who have discover'd Truths whereof he's ignorant.

Those who doubt of the Christian Religion, or that reject it, ought to retire within themselves, and consider why they yield not to its Reasons. They will find perhaps, that the imaginary Pleasure of being above the common Level, and their Unwillingness to be in the same Rank with such as they despise, are the true Causes which retain them in their Doubts and Infidelity; or at least, that this Disposition contributes towards it very much.

As it cannot be deny'd that Pride is a Vice, and Modesty a Vertue, it must be granted, that such as act by a Principle of Pride do put themselves in danger, at least of being deceiv'd; and that therefore Pride should never be concern'd in the Search of Truth.

This every body will own; but I may be ask'd, How we shall know that a Man judges by a Principle of Vanity, and by what means we can defend our selves from the Delusions of Pride? for those who reject the common Opinions, will not acknowledge that they do it out of Vanity.

To this I answer, that besides a Man's own Consciouſness, we may know by two things whether the Motive of Pride comes into our Judgments of things.

The first is, that when we judg after that manner, we never carefully examine the Matter in question. We content our selves with a very general and superficial Review; after which we peremptorily conclude, without ever beginning our Examen anew. 'Tis to no purpose for those who are condemn'd to beg a little patient Hearing, or to have their Reasons exactly consider'd once more; for they shall no longer be listen'd to. They are condemn'd without Appeal, and can never recover themselves. So a Judgment once made without Examination, serves for a Principle to others, who continue to condemn on what they never well thought of, and will not grant any Hearing to their Adversaries.

If any doubts of what I say, let those who out of Pride have rashly decided against the Truth they did not understand, endeavour exactly to repeat the Reasons of them they have condemn'd. Had they judg'd after a mature Examen, which requires a long and strict Discussion of all that was alledg'd in Defence of what they condemn'd, they would so well understand it, as never to forget it. They could repeat, and shew the Weakness of each Reason

son brought against them : As we see a Judg, that has carefully read and examin'd all the Parts and Papers of a Trial, report the Particulars without any Hesitation ; especially when it is a Matter of Consequence, and deserving Attention.

But I take it for granted, that those who reject the Truth of the Christian Religion, cannot distinctly report the Reasons of such as defend it, nor tell what they except against in every one of them. This is what they should examine themselves about, and without which, they must confess they did pronounce a hasty Sentence : nor can they, without Injustice, refuse to examine once again a Matter of so great Importance.

All the Books that have been seen, and all the Discourses we could hear upon this Subject, contain only some loose Difficulties, which seem by no means to be the Result of an exact and methodical Examination. These Difficulties cannot be more sufficient to inform those who would judge solidly of so great an Affair, than the Objections of one of the Parties are to inform equitable Judges.

We have therefore Reason to believe, that those who declare themselves against the Christian Religion, after resolving out of Vanity against the common Sentiments, continue to reject them by the same Principle. I confess they may have,

and that they actually have, other Motives; for it is very rare, that in a Judgment which is made of a Subject so full as the Christian Religion with all its Consequences, there should not enter Motives of divers sorts. But I maintain, that the particular one of Pride, I have been speaking of, is found among the rest. I won't say here, that the other Motives, whatever they may be, are not better than this. I shall prove it in the Sequel of this Work: for 'tis enough now to shew that Vanity is concern'd in't.

Another thing, whereby it may be known what great Influence Pride had upon a Judgment made of any Subject, is, that after having embrac'd an Opinion that cannot be demonstrated, 'tis presum'd that this Opinion unexamined must serve as an infallible Rule to judg of Truth and Falshood. Mathematicians have their Axioms, their Definitions, and their Suppositions, which they do not demonstrate, by reason of their own great Clearness and Plainness, which puts 'em beyond the Reach of all sorts of Doubts. They have Reason to suppose them therefore, without proving them; but to suppose most obscure and uncertain, not to say false things, and to make use of those Suppositions as Principles, is absurd. To expect this Method should be approved of, and to treat scornfully those who reject it, is

so sensible a Mark of their being govern'd by Vanity, that I do not know a greater Proof can be given of it.

The Jews, for Example, when the Gospel began to appear in the World, thought they had a Right to suppose as indisputable the eternal Duration of the Mosaick Law, and the Necessity of observing it in order to become acceptable to God; that to demand a Proof of it was sufficient to gain their Hatred. The Greek Philosophers likewise of that time, look'd upon themselves as so knowing, and upon their Opinions as so well establish'd, that every thing was false, in their Judgment, which contradicted them the least in the World. Nevertheless it may be said, that the particular Principles of the Jews and Heathen Philosophers, compar'd to Christianity, were not even probable; as I could shew, if those I have to do with doubted of it. So the Jews, those *blind Guides of the Blind*, and the Greeks conceited of a thousand Chimera's, concluded the Gospel to be false out of mere Vanity.

Those who, being educated among Christians, are got into the same Fancy, should take heed they do not commit the like Fault, unless they will be voluntarily deceiv'd. Let them examine then whether, in the Judgment they form of Christianity, they suppose nothing but what is clear and incontestable. They reproach
Christians

Christians with making Suppositions without Proofs ; let them not be guilty therefore themselves of what they object to others.

For my own part, I'm perswaded that if they go back to the first Principles of their Reasonings, and then reduce them to certain Propositions, they will be convinc'd of their having built upon the most obscure and incomprehensible Principles that ever were. To suppose, for example, that *there is but one Substance in the World, compounded of Extension and Thought, and which modifies it self, as we see the Universe is, without having any supreme Intelligence distinct from the Universe it self concern'd about it* : To suppose, I say, so strange a Proposition without demonstrating it, is certainly to imagine that the peremptory manner of saying such obscure things serves them for Evidence or Demonstration. When I say *to demonstrate*, I understand, as Mathematicians do, what leaves no Doubt nor Difficulty behind in the Minds of any who understand the Terms of the Demonstration. Otherwise they must not talk of demonstrating, unless they would impose upon the Weak by this Word. Let the Writings of those be read over and over who maintain the Proposition I have mention'd, and ground themselves upon it, to deny the Truth of Christianity, and it will appear that there

is nothing in all Religion which equals the obscuring of this Principle. There are notwithstanding some People, who utter it as an incontestable Truth, and judge thereby of whatever the Christians say concerning God, the Creation of the World, and Providence. If these People would diligently examine themselves, I'm much deceiv'd if they did not discover that one of the greatest Reasons which brings them to think this a clear Principle, is, their valuing themselves upon defending an Opinion remote from vulgar Notions, and of admitting rather the most obscure things imaginable, than they should mix again with the Croud, from which they endeavour'd hereby to distinguish themselves. As Credulity and Superstition add to their Objects, as it were, a false Light, which serves them instead of Evidence: So Pride makes a Geometrical Principle of a thing that's in it self unintelligible.

There are other Persons to whom this dogmatical and peremptory Air is so displeasing, that they equally condemn such as stick to the vulgar Opinions, and those who, forsaking what is commonly receiv'd, endeavour to establish new Principles. They think that seeing there are Difficulties every where, and those sometimes insurmountable, the surest way is to affirm nothing, and to reject all without esta-

establishing any thing. I will not undertake to confute this Principle here; I shall only say, that altho this Way seems very different from that whereof we have been speaking, it is probable nevertheless that it proceeds from the like Disposition of Mind. It is not much less agreeable to humane Pride to consider it self secur'd from popular Errors by doubting of every thing, than by establishing Principles contrary to those that are commonly receiv'd. Some look upon other Men as the Sport of their Opinions, and the Prey, to speak so, of a thousand Chimeras; whilst, under the Shelter of Doubt, they think themselves safe from the Danger of Error.

It might be said nevertheless by some Men, that not Pride, but the mere Impossibility of discovering the Truth, which is a very mortifying thing, is the Cause of their Doubts. I won't say that they appear not over-mortify'd who are in this Condition, nor will I set about to shew the Absurdity of Scepticism; I shall only remark, that no body stops at a mere Doubt in Religion. Those who say they have Doubts, are not content to look upon others as possibly deceiv'd, but as effectually so. They consider not themselves as Persons who might well be in an Error, but as having found the true Secret of Infallibility; and this may be the

Effect

Effect of humane Pride, as much as the boldest Determinations. Let them have a great Care therefore; and since it is manifest, that to doubt as well as to affirm out of Vanity, is exposing of ones self to Error, let them get rid of this fallacious Passion; or, at least, suspend the Influence of it whilst they judg of Religion.

We require not this of them from the Principles of that Religion whereof they doubt, or which they reject, but from this Maxim of common Sense, viz. *That a Passion, such as Pride is, cannot be of any Service in the Discovery of the Truth.*

C H A P. III.

That what keeps Unbelievers from yielding to the Proofs of the Christian Religion, partly consists perhaps in mere Prejudices, which all the while may be false.

WERE I writing against the Pagans, Jews, or Mahometans, and should say that their Prejudices kept them wedded to the Religions whereof they made Profession; then all the World, as well those who believe as those that disbelieve Christianity, would conclude me in the right. But as I write against Men

Men that have been educated in the Christian Religion, and that are not persuaded of its Truth, it may be ask'd what it is I understand here by Prejudices, when I say that they are the Cause, perhaps, why Unbelievers yield not their Assent to it. They were brought up, as I said, in Christianity, which, one would think, should prejudice them in favour of this Religion. But there are two sorts of Prejudices; the first are the Effects of Instruction, such as are those of the Jews, of the Heathens, and of the Mahumetans, against Christianity. The second proceed from a particular Depravation of the Mind and Understanding of some, and whereof it is somewhat difficult to render a Reason.

These People do easily conquer sometimes the Prejudices of their Education; but after slightly forming to themselves other Notions without examining them as they should, they afterwards become Prejudices to them all the rest of their Lives; and 'tis of these Prejudices I design to treat upon this occasion. I shall not determine how they are form'd, because they owe their Original to such a Complication of several Motives, and to Circumstances so different, that it is not possible, it may be, to distinguish them rightly. 'Tis enough that they be true Prejudices; that is to say, hasty Conclusions, which
serve

serve 'em afterwards instead of a Principle.

Let us suppose, for example, that a Man born in any part of *Christendom*, where very gross Errors, as it happens but too often, are mix'd with the Doctrine of Jesus Christ and his Apostles; let us suppose, I say, that this Man comes to discern these Errors by reading the Books of those Divines who are of the contrary Party: He's presently cur'd of the Prejudices of his Education; for he was always told that the Sentiments maintain'd in the Place of his Nativity were true. It may notwithstanding fall out that a Person capable of discovering these Errors, cannot go back to the very Spring, and examine the Christian Religion in it self, such as it is in the Writings of the Apostles. There he stops then, and imagines not only that the Religion of his Country is false, but he makes the same Conclusion concerning all Religions, without excepting that of the first Followers of Christ. He may entertain such Thoughts a great while before he can find any body to whom he dares open his Mind, or that is able to undeceive him if he does: and these Thoughts may take such deep Rooting at length, that it shall not be an easy Matter afterwards to eradicate them. If the Man too be any thing speculative, he may in this Condition form other Principles, upon

on which he shall reason all his Life, tho they be in themselves most false.

These are the Prejudices from which, I said, we must preserve our selves, and that may contribute much to get the Christian Religion rejected. All those who are tainted with them, are not equally capable of expressing them clearly; and besides, they dare not always declare them freely to those with whom they discourse upon the Subject; so that it is a most difficult Business to examine them in such a manner as may turn to their Advantage.

Nevertheless, it may be said in general of all Judgments made of a thing from Principles which are not certain, that if Men should thus hit upon the Truth, it must be by pure Chance, and consequently not to be rely'd upon. If this Rule is to be observ'd in the Search of all sorts of Truth, how much more is it to be regarded in a Truth of so great Importance as Religion is granted by all to be?

This Rule then is grounded upon common Sense, and no body can disagree to it. Now let us apply it to a Prejudice very common amongst those who doubt of the Truth of Christianity, or that plainly reject it. They cannot, they say, believe the Miracles upon which it is built, because they never saw any Miracles, nor ever spoke to any Persons worthy of Credit,

dit who assur'd 'em that he had seen the like. They cannot any better imagine that this Earth whereupon we live had a Beginning, or that ever there was a time when there were neither Animals nor Plants. The Reason of this is, because they have always remark'd in a manner the same state of things, and have never spoke to any that had seen this Beginning.

I maintain in the first place, that this is a mere Prejudice, which may be reduc'd to this general Maxim; *A Man cannot believe that whereof he has never seen any Examples, nor spoke to any Eye-witnesses worthy of Credit who could give a Relation of it.* We shall find that this is very far from a Geometrical Axiom, if we examine the Grounds of it. What has perswaded some People to a Belief of this Principle, is, That many times they discover'd Falshoods by its means. Some antient Philosophers, for Example, have confuted the Fables of the Poets concerning the Centaurs, the Giants, the Monster Chimera, and the like fictitious things, by this very Maxim, *What has been, now is; Palepbat. and shall be for the future.* I agree that this *de reb. incredibil.* Axiom may be of use, when such as affirm unheard-of things deserve no Credit, as were the Poets, who own'd they had invented a great part of what they said. But I deny that it extends generally to all things;

things, or that it can pass for a self-evident Maxim.

When a possible thing is attested by People in whom we see no appearance of Dishonesty or Fraud, this Maxim is of no use, altho we never saw any thing like that which we are told of, nor ever heard others speak of it. Those who first discover'd *America*, and spoke of the Plants or Animals they had found there, and which are Strangers to our Continent, were worthy of Credit, and deserv'd to be believ'd, though we had never heard of the like before; nay though none had gone after them to *America*, and that we had not read their Voyages till a long time after their Decease. It is manifest, that such as should count their Relations fabulous from this Principle, would fall themselves into a very great Error, as Time has shewn. The same may be said of what was declar'd by the first who affirm'd they had been with our Antipodes. What they said was not the less true, because till then it was not heard of; and had the Art of Navigation decay'd so much after their Return, that none had since undertaken the same Voyage, such as should now read their Travels could have no sufficient Reasons to disbelieve what they said.

It is plain by these Examples, that this Maxim cannot pass for a Mathematical

Axiom

Axiom, that admits of no Exception; and that consequently nothing can be merely concluded from it without the Addition of other Proofs. If it be consider'd in it self, this will not be the more call'd in question, seeing there is no body such a Fool as to make his present Knowledg the Measure or Rule of True and False in all Matters. Who can, without Extravagancy, flatter himself to have so extensive a Knowledg of all possible things, as to pronounce that certainly false which is not contain'd in his own Stock of Knowledg? But it is not necessary to be more large in the Confutation of so strange an Imagination.

Nevertheless the Incredulous suppose this, without perceiving it, as a Geometrical Principle; and from it conclude that what is said, for Instance, of the Creation of the World, and of Miracles, is not true. Let them seriously consider the Point, and they'll find that from a Prejudice so little reasonable they draw Consequences which they think clear as the Day. The good Opinion they conceive of themselves and their Knowledg, join'd to Experience, which upon some occasions does confirm this Maxim, makes them shut their Eyes upon this account, as said, without perceiving it.

I shall bring another Example of a Prejudice not better establish'd than the for-

mer, and whereupon is grounded, notwithstanding, a great part of the Reasonings of Unbelievers. Some who have Sense enough to quit the Opinions of their Youth which they drew from their Education, without knowing why, have not always Penetration and Exactness of Judgment enough to substitute any thing better in their room: Yet they cannot forbear searching out other Principles; for none can absolutely stop there, as I could easily shew, were this the proper place of doing it.

As they are not satisfy'd with what they learn'd concerning God and Religion, so they form to themselves new Ideas of them, which are little better than their former ones; but they please them more, because they are the Fruits of their own Meditation, which never fail of delighting the Understanding that is their Parent. They imagine, for Example, That if there were a God, who had created Men, who would do 'em Good, and in order to it had reveal'd himself to them, he ought to have done it in this manner. First, He should (according to them) have made himself known to all Mankind, to render them equally happy, seeing he is their common Father. Secondly, This Revelation should have begun from the Creation of the first Man, and so be continu'd throughout all the World, according as it was planted with

with Men; seeing it is not less necessary to such as are born now, than to those of the Ages past. Thirdly, It should have been at the Beginning so clear, and deliver'd with Circumstances so convincing, that none could doubt of the Sense or Truth of the Revelation; and the Proofs of it ought to have still subsisted, that every one might examine them, without relying upon the Relation of another; otherwise, if there be any Revelation, it is useless, say they, as Experience shews. In the fourth place, This Law should have been proportionated to the present State of Mankind, that so it might be obey'd; or else the Creator of Men ought to reform their Nature, to the end it should not oppose it self to the Observation of his Laws; without which, they signify almost nothing, and are unworthy a Wisdom that knows the Condition of them to whom it prescribes them; or of a bountiful Being who prescribes them to Men, to render them more happy.

These Principles appear specious at first sight, because they seem to be built upon the high Idea we ought to have of the Divinity. And as the Incredulous think they see the quite contrary in what the Christians say of Revelation, they hence conclude, that the Christians are in an Error; and they imagine to prove it the better against them, in as much as they

build upon the same Suppositions with them concerning the Nature of God.

But I'm going to shew, that this way of reasoning is grounded upon a Prejudice, which is manifestly false: for to come at the Propositions we now read, they must proceed by these Steps. 1. By reasoning we may exactly know what should be the Carriage of God towards Men, if there be a God, such as he is describ'd. 2. We do in effect form an exact and complete Idea of God, which is contain'd in the Propositions we have been reading. 3. And if the suppos'd Carriage of the Creator is not conformable to it, then there is no such thing, and all that is said of it is false. 4. We see, by the History of times past, and by what we know of the present State of Mankind, that the very contrary has always happen'd to this day. 5. Therefore, &c.

These are the Propositions which those, I mention'd before, suppose; as all, who have any Idea of the right Method of Reasoning, must grant. But the first of these Propositions is certainly false: for it is manifest that Revelation is not clear enough concerning the Designs of God with respect to Mankind in general, as that we might thence form an exact or complete Idea of his Carriage towards Men. And it is a thing not material for us to know; no body being oblig'd to learn

learn more than he ought to believe and do, in order to become acceptable to God, without troubling himself about the Methods of his Providence with relation to Mankind in general, nor yet about his secret Designs. To be a good Subject to a Prince, it is no ways needful to penetrate into all the Secrets of his Politicks and Designs; it is sufficient to know what the Laws of the State command him to perform. This is what *Moses* taught the *Israelites*, when he said to them, that *secret things belong'd to the Lord, but the things reveal'd to them and to their Children.* Deut. 29. 29.

The first Proposition being false, the second, which is a Consequence of it, cannot hold; and no Person, without an extravagant Presumption, can say that he has a perfect Idea of the Method whereby God ought to govern the World, if he would act conformable to the Virtues that are attributed to him. For indeed, although we have some Idea of these Attributes, it follows not that we conceive them in their whole Extent, or that we can exactly know what Carriage is most agreeable to them. We know, for Example, that God is most wise; that is to say, that this Sovereign Intelligence never acts, without proposing certain Ends worthy of himself, and that he goes to those Ends by the Ways he judges to be most proper, and that are effectually

so. But for all this, we know not, at least in a distinct manner, every End which he has propos'd to himself, nor all the Ways whereby he designs to come at them. No body could ever boast of gathering this from either Revelation, or the Events that happen in the World. We know by History, that some Princes have govern'd their Subjects with great Wisdom; but who can value himself upon knowing all their particular Designs, and the Methods they have us'd to come at their Ends, only from their Writings or their Conduct? It must be confest then, that we may know something of the Attributes of God, without being able to penetrate into all the Secrets of his Conduct; and common Sense does teach us, that we ought not to judg rashly thereof.

This being so, the third Proposition cannot be look'd upon, but as the most presumptuous and temerarious Imagination that could possibly be. It would be absurd to reason thus concerning an earthly King, and boldly to affirm that he was guilty of ill Management because he had not follow'd our Idea of the Conduct he should observe, without our having an exact Knowledg of the State of his Affairs, nor of his Designs. And it is a thousand times more absurd so to judg of the Divine Understanding, infinitely exalted above ours; for we must remember, that

that Unbelievers reason upon this Occasion from the Principles of Revelation.

To come to the fourth Proposition, we cannot exactly judg of God's Providence towards Mankind during the Ages past, by the Histories we have. Few of 'em are extant : but if we had all the Histories that ever were written, yet that would not be enough to form such a Judgment by. The exactest Histories do necessarily omit a world of things, and relate only the most considerable Events which regard States, rather than the Opinions of Nations, or the Revelations they might receive from Heaven.

It must be granted then, that none can, without extreme Rashness, take upon them to be Judges of Divine Providence ; or to conclude that there is no God, because he governs not the World after that manner they think he should. This Answer might suffice to shew the Fallity of those Prejudices which the Incredulous form against Revelation and Providence, and which I have set down in this Chapter.

However, to shew fully the Danger of being impos'd upon by Prejudices of this nature, I shall examine them as they are in themselves, though I have already destroy'd their Foundation. I might, without any more ado, say concerning the first Proposition, That God had sufficiently
made

made himself known to all Men, by revealing his Will to the first Patriarchs from whom they are descended, to *Noah*, for Example, and to his Children; and it is very probable, that the general Belief of a God, and the Service due to him, has its Origin hence rather than from the Reasonings of any People. I might add likewise, That God having created Men free, and contenting himself with giving them Laws, they have abus'd their Liberty by violating his Commands, and so became unworthy that God should continue to make himself known to them, as perhaps he might have done, if they had made a better Use of the Favours he was pleas'd to heap upon them.

But I shall only say, That he might very well, without any way blemishing his Goodness, bestow more Favours upon some People than others. There is nothing so free as the Effects of Beneficence which are not due; and no body can reasonably complain that he has not receiv'd from such a Benefactor what he had given to others. On the contrary, he ought to be thankful that he gave him what he has, and which was no more due to him than what he has not. As there is a great Diversity amongst Creatures of several Kinds, some having more and some less Properties than others; and that all the while no Person maintains that God ought
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to have made all equally perfect, without putting any Difference between his Works: why might not God also be pleased to place some Variety in the same Species of Beings? Since we see that the Disposition of Humane Bodies does vary in a world of things, that their Understandings are not more of a piece, and since it is not thought strange that God has thus differently distributed his Gifts; why should it be accounted a wonderful thing that God has imparted more or less Light to the several Nations which compose Mankind? The greatest Difficulty in this matter, if I'm not mistaken, proceeds from this, that People, without perceiving it, confound God's Justice with his Beneficence; and withal they unreasonably suppose, that God requires an equal Return of Vertue from all Men, and that he will judg them all by the same Law. Upon this Supposition, it seems repugnant to the Attributes of God to expect as much from the *Casars of Africa* or the Savages of *America*, as from more knowing People; and it is thought unjust that God should dispense his Gifts so diversly, since he would judg all Men upon the same Foot.

But tho the Beneficence of God be, according to Revelation, perfectly free, insomuch that no Nation can complain that another is preferr'd to it; his Justice

Rom. 9.
10, &c.

Rom. 11.
23.

Mat. 12.
21.

Rom. 2.
12.

Justice follows the same Rules that he has prescrib'd to the Justice of Men. He gives to whom he will, and in what quantity he pleases, but he judges according to what he has bestow'd. *He requireth not what he has not given, and he reapeth not where he has not sow'd. Those that sin without the Law shall perish without the Law; and those that sin under the Law shall be judg'd by the Law.*

As for the second Question touching the continuance of Revelation, all the Difficulty is taken away by what is now said. God will have all reasonable Regard to every Circumstance of those People to whom he has so differently distributed his Favours. Revelation does teach us the contrary no where; and if any Christian Doctors have added to the Doctrine of the Apostles, it is incumbent upon them to defend their own Opinions, and not upon those who design only to defend the Christian Religion. None can, without Injustice, impute to its Founders all that has been since built upon the Foundations they first laid, as it shall be made appear more at large in the second Part of this Work.

The third Proposition concerning the Evidence of the Proofs of Revelation, its perpetual Subsistence, and the Perspicuity of its Expressions, does suppose, that the Design of God was to teach Men his Will
mathe-

mathematically, which is a Supposition contrary to the present State of Mankind; a State of Liberty, wherein Laws and not Demonstrations are propos'd to them. Supposing that God would appoint Rewards and Punishments, he could not lead Men to Vertue, nor avert them from Vice, otherwise than by Laws whereof the Sense could not be more clear, and yet the Justice and Authority of them be never mathematically demonstrated. If all Mankind were convinc'd of the Truth of Revelation, and of the Sense of it, by mathematical Proofs, no body then could resist it. There could be, consequently, no Punishments for the guilty, because none would be guilty; nor could there be any more Reward; for what Recompence can a Man expect for assenting to a mathematical Demonstration?

It will be demanded, perhaps, why God should govern Man after this manner, and not mathematically, as some Unbelievers would have him? But I'm not bound to account for God's Bounty, which he diversifies as he pleases, for Reasons unknown to us: 'Tis enough that I prove he cannot be accus'd of Injustice; and this, I'm perswaded, I can perfectly demonstrate.

To be short, the Divine Laws are proportionated to the Nature of Man, whatever they may say who have not study'd
them

them as they ought. 'Tis an undoubted Truth, agreed upon by all Christian Divines, That God does not damn any Person barely for violating his Laws, but for not leaving his ill Habits, that being the Man's own Fault. I shall insist no longer upon this, lest I digress too far from the Subject I treat of in this Chapter.

What I conclude from all I have said, is, That Unbelievers do frequently take ill-grounded Prejudices for clear Principles, from which they hastily judg of the whole Christian Religion. I have alledg'd plain Examples of it, and could have brought several more; but those cited by me may suffice to make a reasonable Man take care of passing such precipitant Conclusions. This is all that I require in this place, and which the most incredulous Man living cannot, without extreme Folly, refuse me. Now, I'm perswaded if Unbelievers would take the pains to look back upon the first Propositions which they build upon, that they should perceive a great part of them could by no means pass for Axioms; and then they would quickly acknowledg how little Solidity was to be found in their other Principles.

C H A P. IV.

That many are Unbelievers, because they know not how to reason rightly.

IN the preceding Chapters I suppos'd that Unbelievers did not reason well, and that, without perceiving it, they suffer'd themselves to be seduc'd by their Passions or Prejudices; but I did at the same time suppose that they might be reclaim'd by Arguments, when they were shew'd that they follow'd not the Rules of good Sense. But there are more than one kind of Unbelievers; and some of them, those I mean who are to be the Subject of this Chapter, are Unbelievers upon no other Account, but because they cannot reason well, as I shall presently demonstrate.

But we must remark before, that, the Christian Religion consisting in Doctrines and Matters of Fact, to prove both these we must make long Reasonings, and alledg many Proofs depending upon one another. Thus to perceive the Force of those Reasons brought to prove the Divinity of the Christian Religion, we must be capable not only of understanding every Proposition or every Argument by it self; but likewise to enter into the Discussion

cussion of all that is said, by examining the Connection of the Reasonings, and the Relations which a great number of Ideas have towards one another. But there are a world of People who entertain a good Opinion of themselves, and are not capable, nevertheless, of this Examination, nor to consider distinctly so great a Collection of such compounded and perplex'd Ideas.

I shall be immediately told, no doubt, That if this be so, I do but lose my time in reasoning with them; since I suppose that they are not capable to know the Solidity of an Argument. Yet two things oblige me to do it, whereof the first and principal is, that what I have to say upon this Subject may contribute to keep those who are perswaded of the Truth of Christianity, from being seduc'd by the Example of this sort of Unbelievers. An infinite number of People who believe the Christian Religion true, know not the Proofs of it so perfectly, and are not so much confirm'd in their Belief, but that they may be tempted by the Example of those Unbelievers who reason little. They are of all Qualities and Conditions; and the haughty Air whereby they reject Revelation, is not sometimes less dangerous than the most specious Sophistry.

In the second place, It may happen that such as are not Masters of the true Method

thod of Reasoning, may notwithstanding be in a Condition of leaving their Ignorance, and of making a better Use of their Understandings. It is very fit to convince this sort of People that they are only Unbelievers, because they know not how to govern their Thoughts. But I grant that those who are grown old in this kind of Ignorance, and whose Presumption is encreas'd by their Age, are in a manner incurable, go to work with them how you will; especially if any Immorality be join'd to this want of Judgment, which never fails scarcely to happen: Nor is it for such that we write, as Books of Physick are not written about incurable Diseases.

To be perswaded our selves that there are, in effect, some People who for want of knowing how to reason refuse their Assent to the Gospel, we need only reflect a little upon the present State of the Heathens, and upon what we know of many Unbelievers which live among Christians.

Such as undertake to convert the Indians, and the other Idolaters of *Asia*, *America*, and *Africa*, after taking a great deal of pains to learn their Language, are forc'd to take much more when they would by reasoning perswade them of the Falsity of their Religions, and of the Truth of that of Jesus Christ. The Monks may long enough make all imaginable Efforts

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to become intelligible to those ignorant People, and to convince them of the Absurdity of their Idolatry, and the Opinions whereupon it is built; but although this thing be so plain, yet there are but few of them who can be made to understand it, and fewer that conceive the Reasons upon which Christianity is grounded.

'Tis not necessary that I speak here of the Means which the Missionaries have chosen to employ in their Conversions, rather than Reason. This makes nothing to my Design. I shall only remark, that the Difficulty of bringing those Idolatrous Nations to receive the Gospel, proceeds not from any Infidelity peculiar to them from the People of *Europe*. They are, upon the contrary, the most credulous People in the World, and very seriously embrace a great number of incredible things, whereof their Theology is made up. Their Incredulity, with respect to the Gospel, proceeds from their not reasoning almost at all, except about things relating to Life; and that nothing ever enters into their Minds except from Experience or Education. They are not Men that meditate, and are capable of attentively considering abstracted Ideas, nor of comparing them with one another, to draw some Consequence from them. So for want of meeting a little reasoning in these People, one is extremely

tremely puzzl'd how to get 'em to change their Opinions.

This cannot be said of the Mahometans, since we know that their Divines do sometimes write with Subtlety and Sense enough against some of the Doctrines which the Missionaries would have 'em embrace. Nor can we treat them as Infidels that reject the Christian Religion out of a Spirit of Scepticism; for they are every thing rather than *Pyrrhonians*, seeing they most heartily believe all the Alcoran. Nevertheless, altho they have Sense enough (as I said) to make Objections against some Doctrines that are preach'd to them, yet they have not enough to examine the Principles of their own Religion, and to see upon what it is grounded. They don't so much as understand what is said to them upon that Head, nor the Reasons brought to prove the Truth of Christianity. And if the Missionaries now and then convert some of 'em, it is not from any Reasons they alledg, but in gaining their Love and Esteem by some other ways.

The Jews are much in the same Condition, as it may be seen by the Books they have written to establish their own Opinions, or to confute those of the Christians. This may be easily discover'd also by any that discourses with them upon these Subjects. But between them and

the Mahometans there is this Difference, that the latter give Credit to a Book full of Impertinencies and Falshoods; whereas the Jews ground their Perswasion upon the Books of the Old Testament, which contain a true Revelation. And yet they can reason little better than the Mahometans; which is one of the greatest Obstacles to their Conversion. Whilst they are satisfy'd with the mere Authority of some Rabbins, tho without any Foundation, they are Proof against the strongest Reasons the Christians can oppose to 'em; because from their Infancy they are wont to believe what their Rabbins tell them, and are never taught to reason justly.

Otherwise, if the Jews were in a Condition of pursuing an Argument, and of distinguishing a good from an ill Consequence, it would then be very easy to convince them of the Truth of Christianity. It should be only needful, as some Christian Divines have lately done, to put them upon proving the Truth of the Divine Mission of *Moses*, as they would prove it to a Heathen they design'd to proselyte to Judaism. For if they bring any solid Proofs for this matter, it may be easily made evident, that these same Reasons are incomparably stronger in favour of the divine Mission of Christ and his Apostles, than in favour of that of *Moses*; as it has been shewn in the Book whose
Title

Title you may see in the Margin.

Limborch.
Amica
collat.cum
Erudit.
Judæo.

Now then, to convince the Jews and other Infidels by Reason, they must be first taught the Art of methodically digesting their Thoughts, and be accustomed to reason strictly upon other Heads, that they may learn to understand the Force of the Proofs upon which the Gospel is founded. But this is what all the Missionaries in the World are not able to do, especially to those Infidels who are advanced in Years. It were Injustice to believe that 'tis only amongst Infidels that Men are found incapable of discerning the Goodness of an Argument; and who, upon this account, reject the Christian Religion. There are Unbelievers among Christians themselves, who are not only such out of some Disposition. engaging them against the Gospel, but likewise out of downright Stupidity, and for want of understanding the Reasons whereupon Christianity is grounded.

There are some People who from their Childhood have been brought up to some Trade, or other constant Business, without any Care taken about the forming of their Minds, or even of instructing them in Religion; and who, being moreover of a Genius not very proper for conceiving of things reveal'd, tho haughty and presumptuous, have grown to a full Age without any farther Instruction, or being cur'd

of their Pride. These are rarely perswaded of the Truth of the Christian Religion; nay, they frequently reject it entirely, or at least, in part: not only because they know not the Proofs of it; but also because they understand them not, when they hear them from those that do know them. These unpolish'd and ignorant Creatures imagine that there is nothing true, but what they perceive by their Senses, or what they have found by their own Experience to be possible, or, in a word, what they find conformable to their Passions. Thus neither the speculative Doctrines of Religion, nor the Practice of it, nor yet the History of those who taught it being within the Verge of their Knowledge, they refuse to believe them rather out of Brutality and Stupidity, than as deceiv'd by captious Reasonings. If they reject it not altogether, 'tis certain however that they retain only what is most pleasing to them; which is an evident Demonstration that they are not perswaded of it from Reasoning and Knowledge; because the Proofs which confirm a part of it, are the same that shew the whole Religion to be true.

'Tis not only amongst People taken up with Trade and Business that this sort of Unbelievers is to be found; for there are more of 'em, perhaps, amongst such as aspire to great Preferments, amongst Soldiers,

diers, and Persons of Quality. It may be said indeed, that Persons of these Ranks have had a better Education than others, with relation to the Affairs of the World, and those Employments to which they were design'd: But in very truth, it is as common a thing to hear them reason as wretchedly about Religion, as the most ignorant among the Populace. When once they are grown old in their Prejudices against Christianity, then their natural Vanity, encreas'd with their Age, renders them more obstinate, and not seldom makes 'em altogether inaccessible to Truth. You propose the most cogent Arguments to them in vain; for they look upon them as mere Sophisms, tho they know not wherein Sophistry differs from solid Reasoning.

I shall be told, perhaps, that this sort of Men is not so ignorant of the Art of Thinking as I suppose them to be, seeing they reason not so ill concerning those things they know by Experience, and that they govern themselves with Prudence enough in the Affairs of Life. To this I answer, That I do not deny but those, I speak of, may reason very well about what are the Objects of their Passions, or when they confine themselves within the Limits of their Experience. But I maintain, that they have not as much as the Notion of reasoning solidly about spe-

culative things, that make no Impressions upon the Senses; such as are the Proofs whereupon the Tráth of the Christian Religion is built.

To be convinc'd of this, we need only examine them, if we can, upon these two Heads. First, We must discourse 'em about some abstracted Subject; such as are, for Example, the general Ideas of most things, the Notions of Vertues and Vices: And if they reason exactly herein, we may justly conclude, that these Persons are not of their number who continue Unbelievers, for want of knowing how to reason rightly. But if we hear them talk of such Matters without any Principles or Coherence, if we see that they do not comprehend what is said to them upon such Occasions, be it never so clear, or notwithstanding all the Pains taken to make it plain, (which happens but too frequently) then it will be easily granted me, that their Infidelity does, at least, proceed in part from their Ignorance of the Art of Reasoning.

Another way we have to discover this kind of Unbelievers, is, when we find them distasted with all Discourses upon abstracted Matters, or with any thing that relates not to their Passions; when they avoid the reading of all Books requiring any Attention, especially of such Books as are written to prove the Truth of what they

they disbelieve; finally, when they won't enter upon a Discussion of any such Subjects, nor will be at the Pains of comparing the Answers of Believers with the Objections of the Incredulous. We may sufficiently know such Persons, who are, so to speak, so fill'd with what they have learn'd from Experience of the Affairs of the World, that nothing else can enter into them, and are displeas'd when they hear other Discourses.

Such was *Festus*, for Instance, the Governour of *Judea*, who is mention'd in the *Acts of the Apostles*. He could scarcely hear a short Discourse from *St. Paul*, and charg'd him with Madness, after hearing from him another Discourse full of Evidence and good Sense. Were he told of some Methods how to squeeze Money dexterously out of his Province, or were he acquainted with some Intrigue that might contribute to prefer him to a more considerable Post, he would immediately understand what was said to him; or he would get it repeated to him so often, and would have ask'd so many Questions about it, that he should at least have an exact Notion of the Business. But because *S. Paul* spoke to him of things no way relating to his Designs or Passions, he could scarce patiently hear him, and understood nothing of his Discourse.

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There are a world of People at this day in the midst of Christendom, who are very near in the same Disposition. They speak very well of their Temporal Affairs, or any thing belonging to them; they willingly converse about the News of the Times, and that sometimes with Sense enough; but put them once by such things to talk of Religion, they are presently tir'd, they speak of it ridiculously, they shew, in a word, so great a Contempt of such Discourses, as if they were Matters beneath them, and to which they cannot stoop without Uneasiness.

As these Unbelievers, who reason not at all, are moreover entirely possess'd with Passions opposite to the Gospel, and have been long habituated to obey them; so they are not accessible on any side, and I see not how, without a Miracle, they can be convinc'd of their miserable State, nor reclaim'd from their Error. However it was fit to make some Reflections upon this sort of Unbelievers, that we might not be impos'd upon when we meet with such, nor seduc'd by their Ways.

C H A P. V.

*That the Neglect of searching into Truth
is often the Cause of Incredulity.*

THere are many Men who have naturally a Genius good enough for abstracted Matters, and that also were not wholly neglected in their first Education; but whom the Course of their Lives has engag'd in Occupations which have no Affinity with the Search of Truth. The Necessaries of their Families, or the Desire of satisfying their Passions, do so take up their Minds for several Years together, that they neglect all other things, never improve their natural Parts, nor distinguish Truth from Falshood, with any Application, in the Business of Religion. This Negligence leads 'em insensibly into Doubting; for if the Connection of religious Truths be not heedfully attended to, there arise a thousand Difficulties in the Mind, out of which we know not how to extricate our selves. From Doubt Men easily fall into Infidelity, whilst they neglect the Search of what may remove their Scruples: for when once they are got into the Understanding, they are in motion upon all occasions; and as the Solutions to
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them are not study'd after at the beginning, we should not wonder if in time they take such deep rooting, as it shall not be an easy Matter afterwards to extirpate them.

If such as refuse to believe the Truth of the Christian Religion seriously examine themselves, I am much mistaken if the greatest Part of 'em won't confess that they have extremely neglected the Care they ought to have us'd, in order to be inform'd of a thing of such Importance. Nay, I dare affirm that there is not any Unbeliever who perceives not, if he minds it, that this Negligence is one of the principal Causes of his Incredulity: and I shall bring many Proofs of it in the Sequel of this Work.

Now, to make what I have said more evident, I will instance this Fault in other Persons, where People may remark it more impartially than in themselves. When Christianity begun to make a Noise in *Judea*, that is, chiefly when the Apostles declar'd every where the Resurrection of their Master, and shew'd that he wanted not faithful Disciples on Earth, tho he was himself no more there; all the *Jews* ought, one would think, to have inform'd themselves of what these Disciples said, seeing they were things most nearly concerning them to know. They expected their *Messias* about that time; they

they groan'd so heavily under the *Roman* Tyranny, that they wish'd for nothing so much as Liberty, and they hop'd the *Messias* should prove their Deliverer. In this Disposition they ought to hearken, I should think, to every one that spoke to 'em of a *Messias*, to get rid of their Doubt, whether the wish'd Deliverer was yet come or not. Methinks too the Apostles should have been heard of all the World, when they preach'd the Doctrine and the Miracles of their Master, especially his Resurrection; for indeed these Miracles were so great and many, that more could not be expected from the *Messias*. The Disciples of the Apostles said in all Places, that not only *Jesus* of *Nazareth*, whom the Jews had crucify'd, did work numberless Miracles whilst he dwelt among Men; but that he also left the same Power to his Apostles, and that, in effect, they wrought Miracles every Day. What could be said more to excite the Curiosity of the Jews? They were not in the Judgment of the *Epicureans*, who thought no Miracles were to be wrought; nor did they believe that God would send them no more Prophets to work any: on the contrary, they expected the *Messias* the greatest of all the Prophets. And notwithstanding, they gave so little heed to what the Apostles said, that the Chief of their Nation never took notice of 'em, unless it was to
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use 'em ill, without examining in the least the Ground of their Doctrine. We have two Jewish Authors who liv'd in the time of the Apostles, namely, *Philo* and *Joseph*; but nevertheless they did not vouchsafe to inform themselves about these Matters, as may be seen by their Writings. *Philo* wrote a great many Books, whereof the most part are allegorical Discourses upon the Old Testament: now in some of these he had a thousand Occasions to mention the Gospel, if he had any Idea of it. If he believ'd the Truth of it, he should, at least, have endeavour'd to confute it somewhere: but he says not a word for or against it, which is sign enough that he knew not what it was. I know very well how *Eusebius* *, and some learned Men after him, pretended that the *Therapeutes* of *Alexandria*, whose Encomium is written by *Philo* in one of his Pieces, were Christians. But nothing, except a desire of confounding the Jews by their own Authors, could discover Christians to *Eusebius*, and those that followed him, in the Description of the *Therapeutes*, where one Syllable is not spoken of Jesus Christ, nor of his Doctrine; and where all that *Philo* says

* Hist. Ecclesiast. l. 2. c. 17. See Jos. Scaliger, l. 7. de Emendat. Temp. Valesius upon Eusebius, and Thomas Brown in his Dissertation concerning the Therapeutes.

says does perfectly quadrate to some of the *Esseans*, who form'd, as 'tis well known, a particular Sect among the Jews. The Desire of convincing Infidels should not induce us to make use of weak Proofs against them; for certainly such Methods must needs render 'em more averse to Christianity.

What I have now said will be easily granted me by Men of any tolerable Reading or Judgment: But it may be disputed with respect to † *Joseph*, by reason of a † *Antiq.* Passage or two produc'd out of him, *Jud. l. 18.* wherein he speaks of Jesus Christ. This *c. 4, & 8.* is not the Place to examine these Passages, which learned Men || believe were inserted || *See Le* by some Christian into the Text of *Joseph*. *Revre in* But be this as it will, 'tis manifest that *his Critical* *Letters.* *Joseph* says nothing of the Slaughter of the Children whereof *St. Matthew* speaks, nor of most part of the Circumstances of the Life of Christ, nor of his Doctrine; nor can he be suppos'd by any to have been acquainted with Christianity, except by such as never read his Works. Had he known a part of the Discourses and Miracles of Jesus Christ, he would not have been content to mention him only *en passant*, and in so few Words; he would be large upon that Subject, no doubt, as it well deserv'd. It may be therefore positively affirm'd, that *Joseph*, how exact soever reputed to be in other Matters, did

did shamefully neglect informing himself about the Christian Religion, altho nothing could have been more easy for him. Nor can any Excuse be pleaded on the behalf of the Heathens who liv'd at that time, or a little after; and that notwithstanding their Acquaintance with some Christians, yet never desir'd to know what Christianity it self was. * *Tacitus*, † *Plinius*, and || *Suetonius*, have spoken of it, and wanted not Opportunities to understand it, tho it appears they did not. They were polite and learned Men, and had spent, according to the Custom of those Ages, a great deal of time in the Study of the Greek Philosophy. Now this Philosophy was not upon any account comparable to the Doctrine or Morals of the Gospel; nor could the Learned of *Rome* neglect these things only because *Barbarians*, as the Grecians spoke, had declar'd them; for they well knew that the most famous Sages of *Greece* had undertaken long Voyages to the *Barbarians*, to learn their Opinions. What made them contemn the Christians then? We need not seek for any other Reason, but a scandalous Neglect, proceeding from the predominant Passion of most People: for ordinarily they apply themselves only to what is esteem'd in the World, and that may contribute to have them taken notice of in the Places of their Abode. The Literature

* *Annal.*

l. 15. c. 44.

† *Ep. l. 10.*

|| *In Claud.*

c. 25.

ture and Philosophy of the * Greeks were for a long time in great Repute at Rome, and Persons of the first Quality did value themselves upon these sorts of Knowledge: but the Gospel was unknown there, because it contain'd not any Doctrine proper to add more Lustre to such as did aspire to the greatest Dignities.

* See the Preface of Diogen. Laertius.

Something of this Nature made the Athenians neglect the Opportunity they had in their Hands of understanding the Gospel, when St. Paul was in their City to preach it, if they would hear him: and, questionless, they would have heard him, had they as much good Sense as they had Vanity. At the very first they call'd him a Babler; and after listening a while to him about the Resurrection of the Dead, some of 'em laugh'd at him, others put him off till some other time, and there were but a small Number of them that receiv'd the Doctrine which he preach'd to them. This proceeded in part from a blameable Neglect that would not let them inform themselves thoroughly about what St. Paul declar'd, altho on the other side, the Athenians, and the Strangers who follow'd their Studies there, were Men of much Leisure, and great Lovers of News. But the Apostle not teaching his Doctrine after the manner of the Philosophers they were wont to hear, whether in regard of the Method or the Elocution,

Acts 17.
18, 22.

Ver. 21.]

they were out of Conceit with his Discourses.

Let us suppose with them, that the outward Appearance of *S. Paul* was not so taking as that of their Philosophers; but should this extinguish their Curiosity? Is Truth always necessarily accompanied with Eloquence? None of them durst maintain such a thing. Notwithstanding, *S. Paul's* being there did 'em no good; and they neglected acquainting themselves with his Doctrine, which was infinitely more reasonable than that of their Philosophers. They lost a world of time in the Study of very ridiculous Doctrines, as were the Physicks of all their Philosophers, without excepting any; and the Morals of the greatest part, to speak nothing of their Dialectick or Logicks. There was not one Philosopher who had any reasonable, no nor a probable Hypothesis concerning God, except the Platonists, who accommodated their Opinions so much to vulgar Notions, that by this Medley of Good and Bad, they render'd all the Good they spoke unprofitable and fruitless. Notwithstanding, such as spent all their time to hear this sort of People, did not vouchsafe, out of an unpardonable Negligence, to understand what *S. Paul* said to them.

One would think no body could at this time of day be guilty of the like Fault among Christians, since they generally pro-

profess to believe that none can better spend his time than in discovering the Principles upon which Christianity is grounded. But the Actions of Christians not being always conformable to their Belief, it happens but too frequently, that their Course of Life produces an Effect quite contrary to what the Christian Profession should beget in them. Altho it be not said by any, that it were better employing himself about any thing else than in the Study of the Christian Religion; yet the Carriage of most Men is commonly such, as if they believed this. A Man who entirely neglects this Study, but duly makes his Court to those that can advance him, or keep him in his present Post; a Man that passes all his Life in heaping up Riches, tho he be in a profound Ignorance about the Grounds of Christianity; this Man, I say, is he for all this the less esteemed? The most understanding Person in the World, but who is not respected for his Preferments, nor consider'd for his Riches, is he comparable to this other ignorant, but rich or honourable Man? Not at all, according to the constant Practice of most Christians. This Practice cries much louder, if we may speak so, than the Evangelical Maxims it contradicts, and seems to say to those who are entering into the World, that it concerns 'em little to learn the Reasons

of assenting to Christianity, but that it is of great Importance to obtain some Employment, or to enrich themselves, to which this same Christianity contributes nothing. It falls out likewise but too often, that this dangerous Lesson is confirm'd by the Example of many considerable Persons, who after neglecting the Study of Religion as much as they cultivate the Art of Advancing themselves in the World, or of making their Fortune, are nevertheless in great Esteem, and in such advantageous Posts, that their Lot appears worthy of Envy; whilst such as might inform others by their Knowledg, live in Contempt and Obscurity.

This general Custom which obtains almost every where, does throw People into a Neglect of Religion so much the more easily as they find themselves dispos'd not to observe the Precepts of it. Thus slighting that Science which signifies nothing as to their worldly Affairs, and whose Consequences would engage them to resist those Passions to which they willingly abandon themselves, they think as little as possibly they can upon those Proofs which perswade us of the Truth of the Gospel. After this it happens, that some occasion of Doubt comes into their Mind which begets Difficulties, out of which they cannot extricate themselves for want of Knowledg; and this at last produces

produces a formal Infidelity, which is not easily to be cur'd, especially if it be of any Continuance.

'Tis by so much the more dangerous to fall into this Negligence I'm treating of, as the Causes whence it springs are always in being, and act incessantly upon the Understanding with a great deal of force; whilst that which might incline People to be instructed in the Reasons of believing the Gospel acts but weakly, and is stiff'd, as it were, every moment by the Example of the more numerous Party.

But there is likewise another thing, that may greatly contribute in seducing such as are otherwise Men of good Sense. 'Tis an Argument they frame without perceiving it, and which at first sight appears solid enough. When they see that those who make a Profession of believing the Christian Religion true, obey nothing of it but just as much as their worldly Interest obliges them to do; they imagine that most Men act a part only, and pretend to believe what they really do not; or else they conclude, that Persons so injudicious as to contradict their Belief upon all occasions, are but an ill Example to follow in this respect, and that it were better done of Men to regulate their Perswasion by their Conduct; seeing, as they suppose, they cannot change the latter. Thus they imitate pretty well the Actions of the

greatest part of the World, but they believe themselves exalted above the Multitude, in as much, at least, as they have Principles conformable to their Practice. If they neglect informing themselves in Religion, this proceeds from their not believing the Truth of it; and if they regulate not their Manners according to its Precepts, 'tis because they give no Credit to the Recompences promis'd those who shall observe them, nor to the Pains wherewith they are menac'd that violate them. In a word, they act coherently; whereas the Life of others is a perpetual Contradiction.

Nevertheless, it is most certain, that they are hugely out in their Judgment of the greatest part of Christians. 'Tis not true, that the Multitude feigns only to believe the Truth of Christianity; and 'tis also false, that Injudiciousness makes them contradict their Belief by their Practice. 'Tis much better to preserve our Perswasion entire, even when we contradict it by our Actions, than to sute the Doctrines of it to the Conduct we follow.

And I prove it thus. In the first place, a Man may sincerely believe a Principle to be good and reasonable, and yet not order his Life accordingly. The Reason hereof is, that what sets most Mens Actions a going, is not so much the Light of the Understanding as the Disposition of the
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the Heart, and the Passions, which are not seldom entirely repugnant to this Knowledge. No body, for Example, will deny but that Bribery ought to have no place in a well-govern'd State, and that all Employments should be conferr'd upon those only who deserve 'em; nay, the Laws do every where condemn Bribery. Nevertheless there are few Persons that do not solicit for themselves or for their Friends when any opportunity of Advancement offers it self. We find also, that Men are agreed about the Usefulness and Excellency of a great number of Laws; which they break nevertheless every day, when they reap any present Advantage from it. We may alledg a more evident Example of this Contradiction between our Understanding and Practice. A gouty Man who contracted this troublesome Distemper by drinking too much Wine, doubts not in the least, but that the immoderate Use of this Liquor must needs prove very hurtful to him; notwithstanding, the present Pleasure he finds in drinking carries it, and he cannot forbear drinking more than he should. And thus it is with several other Passions. In like manner, People whose Desires are contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel, may indulge those Desires, without calling into question all the while the Truth of Christianity.

In the second place, the Manners of most Christians are contrary to their Perswasion, not that they perceive not this Opposition well enough, and condemn it too, when they think of it; but the Method of Living generally receiv'd, and that's most agreeable to their Passions, carries it over the Judgment they make of themselves in their own Consciences; and we may be convinc'd of it by the Examples already alledg'd, and by thousands of the like nature.

In short, It cannot be hence concluded that we must judg of Religion according to our Inclinations, nor that we may accommodate it rather to our manner of living, than continue to believe what we do not obey. Who will maintain that a Prince would do better in changing the Laws according to his present Passions, than to let them subsist, and break 'em every hour? No body. For if he observes not the Laws as he should, he leaves them their Authority however with respect to his Subjects, and such other Princes as are willing to observe them; which is of absolute Necessity to Society. What Disorders would it cause in the Commonwealth, if an adulterous Prince, lest he should be thought to condemn their Authority, would abrogate all those Laws prohibiting Adultery? 'Tis said that *Cambyse* the Son of *Cyrus*, being in Love with his Sister,

Herodot.

l. 3. c. 31.

Sister, and desirous of marrying her, enquir'd of the Royal Judges, who were the Interpreters of the Laws amongst the *Persians*, whether it was lawful for a Brother to have his Sister to Wife? They answer'd him, That there was no Law which permitted it; but that there was another Law that permitted the Kings of *Persia* to do whatever they pleas'd. Upon this Answer, *Cambyfes* marry'd his Sister; and the *Persians* have not from that time scrupl'd to imitate their King in this Practice. It had questionless been less criminal, and much less hurtful to the Society, if *Cambyfes* had marry'd his Sister without saying any thing of it, and not endeavour to cover his Incest by Authority of Law.

If it be ask'd then, Which Carriage is most dangerous and blameable, that of such as violate the Laws of the Gospel whom they believe to be Divine, or that of the Incredulous who reject the Divinity of these Laws because they have no mind to obey them. 'Tis plain, that the latter is much worse than the former, supposing the Laws of the Gospel to be beneficial to Society, which cannot be doubted, as I have shewn in the first Chapter.

So, whatever be the Conduct of those who profess the Christian Religion, Unbelievers cannot however excuse themselves

selves because others do not act coherently, seeing they neglect to understand what imports them most to know. The greatest part of Christians are doubtless in the wrong herein, and they deny it not themselves; but the Incredulous are much more to blame than they. If the latter would examine themselves, they might discover, perhaps, some other Source of this Negligence in their own Persons; and it is, that generally they are not very solicitous about knowing the Truth in Matters of Religion.

There are some People so much taken up with the present, and having so good an Opinion of themselves, that they shut their Eyes and Ears to all sorts of Discourse or Examples, which might convince them that they have reason not to be well satisfy'd with their Opinions and Practice. Altho they seem sometimes to love the Truth, yet, if it be well remark'd, it will appear that they love nothing but their Passions, and are careful only how to indulge these; for they receive no more of the Truth, but what is not incompatible with their Desires. Thus Princes, and Persons of great Quality, cannot bear that such as are about them should ingenuously acquaint them with what is said of them, and tell besides their own Thoughts of the Matter. If any is a little too sincere, he's quickly banish'd from their Presence. 'Tis just

just so with many private Persons, who take none for their Friends but such as flatter them, and help to keep them up in the good Opinion they have conceiv'd of themselves. Princes and private Men do equally drive out of their Minds all Thoughts that might trouble their Repose, and hinder them from quietly enjoying what they love. They cannot say therefore, that they are such mighty Lovers of Truth, who care for knowing no more of it than what is pleasing to them. And it may probably happen that many Unbelievers deal after this manner with Religion, neglecting to understand what might convince them, out of a secret Averseness they have of searching into such Truths as they cannot discover without extremely disquieting themselves. So *S. Paul* reasoning before *Felix*, of Justice, *Acts 24*, Temperance, and future Judgment, this *25* trembling Governour was quickly weary of hearing him, and put him off till another time. Had *S. Paul* entertain'd him with some other Discourse, he would have heard him, it may be, as long as he pleas'd: but the Vertues whereof this Apostle began to speak to him, were too opposite to his Manners to obtain a longer Audience from him. 'Tis evident then, that this Disposition is entirely against all good Sense, and the whole World does equally blame Flattery and Flatterers. 'Tis generally

nerally agreed upon likewise, that there is nothing more remote from Wisdom, than wilfully to continue ignorant of what is disadvantageous to us; for without knowing it, we can never bring a Remedy against it, and our Ignorance about it changes not the Nature of the thing, but contributes not seldom to render our Condition worse. The Incredulous therefore ought to look to it, and not fear to hazard their Repose in the Search of disquieting Truths. They ought to beware of that ill regulated Self-love, which flatters our present Passions, and avoids every thing that may mix some Bitterness with the Sweetness we taste in the Enjoyment of them. For my part, I'm perswaded that their Negligence of informing themselves about the Grounds of Christianity, proceeds in great part from this dangerous Disposition; and they would agree to it, no doubt, were they capable of examining themselves.

Did we see Unbelievers use much Application in the Search of Truth, without omitting any thing that was necessary for their thorough Information, and yet not quit their Infidelity; we should, perhaps, be tempted to believe that they were in the right, seeing they did not conclude but after a long and requisite Discussion. But we see not one of them so dispos'd, and they are all contented with a very superficial

perſſial Knowledge of Religion, without endeavouring to penetrate into the Proofs of it; which gives us occaſion to confirm our ſelves in the Belief of the Truth, and to be perſwaded that their Infidelity proceeds, as I have prov'd, from their Neglect of due Inſtruction.

C H A P. VI.

That Lazineſs may keep many People in Ignorance, Doubts, and Incredulity.

WE may reduce thoſe who make Profeſſion of believing Chriſtiani-ty, to two Orders of Men. Some embrace it rather from the Authority of ſuch as they eſteem, than for having examin'd the Proofs of it; and we may venture to ſay, that theſe are the greater number. There are, however, many underſtanding Perſons, who believe the Truth of the Goſpel for no other Reaſon, but becauſe, after examining the Proofs of it, they have been fully convinc'd. We may alſo divide Unbelievers into two Parties. The one have in ſome ſort examin'd the Reaſons upon which Chriſtians build their Belief, but have not judg'd them worthy of Aſſent, either becauſe they knew not how to examine them

them as they ought, or for some other Reason which I will not stay to examine now. The other sort have never troubled themselves about examining them, and yet they stick not to pronounce our Proofs not convincing. They might be led to this hasty Judgment by divers Motives; or several Passions might contribute together to throw 'em into Infidelity. 'Tis not necessary that I enter upon a nice Discussion of these Motives and Passions. What I have said in general or particular in the foregoing Chapters, may suffice to oblige Unbelievers to retire, as it were, into themselves, and to preserve them from the Delusions of Self-Love. I must nevertheless add here some Remarks upon one of the particular Sources of Incredulity, which is but too common, and whereof I have not yet spoken any thing.

This Source is Laziness, which occasions many People to remove out of their Minds whatever demands Attention, and that makes no Impression upon them by their Senses, or by their Passions. We meet with some who have Understanding and Judgment enough to examine rightly the Proofs of Christianity, if they would apply themselves to it. But the long Habit they have acquir'd of not examining any of these abstracted Ideas which require some Application, makes them so averse to this Examen, that it is not possible

sible to perswade them to it, whilst they remain in this Disposition.

To conquer it, if this can be, and to cure those who indulge themselves in it, or to keep others, at least, from falling into it, we must examine it in its Rise, Progress, and Consequences: for if we can shew that it is the most unreasonable thing in the World in it self, and in its Consequences the most dangerous, it must be necessarily granted, that it is not becoming a Man of good Sense to give way to it.

In the present State of humane Nature, it is certain that nothing can more quickly excite our Attention than what strikes our Senses, or awakens some of our Passions. Whatever is convey'd into the Mind by either of these ways, does so move and occupy it, that if the Sensations be lively, and the Passions quick, no other thing can enter whilst they act there. And Men have naturally an Aversion to all things besides; for if a Man continues long in this Disposition without making any Attempt to subdue it, it happens at last, that tho he be extremely active with regard to sensible things, and those Passions to which he has given up himself; he falls nevertheless into a surprizing Laziness as to all other Matters, and will not hear of reading or examining any thing that has no relation to them. As the Laziness

Laziness of the Body proceeds from such an extreme Love to the Pleasure of that Repose to which we are accusom'd, that we cannot think of losing it without trouble; so the Laziness of the Mind, which I'm now treating of, does so seize upon all those who entertain it, that they cannot shake it off without great Pains and Molestation.

Were we assur'd that nothing merited our Attention, but what made Impression upon our Senses, or related to our Passions, we should then give up our selves to this pleasing Laziness, and live, with respect to spiritual Objects, in the same Calm, wherein we live with regard to whatever we think can neither hurt nor benefit us. It were a Folly to part with a State full of Pleasure, only to disquiet our selves in examining what would occasion Pain, but procure us no Advantage. But on the other hand, if our Negligence of those things, which no way concern the Senses, should occasion us infinitely more Harm, than our Laziness about them could procure us of Pleasure; it must be granted, that it were downright Madness for us to live in this Carelessness. But we cannot assure our selves that there is nothing to be fear'd, should we neglect spiritual things, such as the Christian Religion speaks to us of, without examining the Reasons upon which this Religion is grounded;

grounded; and consequently, we must necessarily conquer this Laziness, that keeps us from doing it; or else prefer the Quiet of a Fool, grounded only upon his Stupidity, to the true Knowledg of the State wherein we are, and of what we have to fear or hope.

Notwithstanding, those who once abandon themselves to this Laziness, which hinders them from any Examination of the Principles of Religion, have the hardest Task in the World to reclaim themselves; some of them, whereof we speak nothing in this place, chuse rather to believe whatever is told them of Religion, than to be at the pains of examining it; and others again will believe nothing of it, because they are resolv'd not to examine any thing of that nature. 'Tis of these last that we have undertaken to treat, and of whom it may be said, that how understanding soever they seem'd to be before they took up this careless way of living, they are afterwards very difficultly brought off from it. *Subit quippe etiam ipsius inertia dulcedo, & invisæ primò desidia Agricol. postremò amatur.* Tacit. in Agricola. c. 3. "The Pleasure of Laziness gets into the Soul, and at last we love that Idleness which at first we hated.

He acts plainly against good Sense, who condemns what he has never well examin'd, because he had not Resolution enough

enough to undergo the Trouble of examining it; and he breaks the Rules of Common Prudence who obstinately lives in this Condition, when the Question is about a Matter of such great Importance as Religion. If he acted thus in relation to any other thing, that is, if he took Sides without being at the pains of examining, who could he get to approve his Conduct? None surely; unless he had to do with Men void of common Sense; since it cannot be deny'd, but this is visibly exposing himself to be deceiv'd, and to all the Consequences of the Error he might fall into.

Let's suppose for a moment with Unbelievers, that the Christian Religion is not true, altho' this cannot be known, till it be first examin'd; but what Risk do they run in hearing the Reasons of the Christians? None at all; since if what they affirm be not conclusive, nothing can hinder them from rejecting it. All the Loss they can fear is only the want of a little Quiet, whereof they deprive themselves for some small time. But methinks a short term of Carelessness ought not to be of so great value with a Man, that nothing can be capable of making him quit it. Is there any in the World who can live in this eternal Indifference for all that requires Application? If any leaves this Laziness for other things, what Reason can he bring

bring for not quitting it in order to discover his own state as to Religion? If indeed, after taking much pains to no purpose, a Man could not enjoy his former Quiet, he might plead very plausibly in Defence of this Carriage; but, on the contrary, after fatiguing himself a little, his Repose is but the more pleasant. And so the Lazy should by this Principle, at least, be at the trouble of examining Religion.

But now if the Christian Religion be certainly true, as we maintain, a more deplorable State could not well be conceiv'd in this Life than that of the lazy Gentlemen we have describ'd: For what can be imagin'd more lamentable, than to precipitate ones self into eternal Misery, rather than take the pains of learning the Means to avoid it? That Man could not be look'd upon as a lazy Person who would not rise at Night for fear of breaking his Repose, tho the House was on fire; no, he would be taken for a Fool or a Madman.

We see by these Examples very clearly, how unreasonable that spiritual Laziness is, which keeps Men from examining Religion. We perceive the dangerous Consequences of it, or at least the Miseries that may proceed from it. Nevertheless there have been formerly Men of this Character, and there are now even among Christians.

Acts 17. 4. Such were those Jews of *Thessalonica*, whereof very few were the better for *S. Paul's* Preaching, because they would not examine what he said; and whereof the most part, very zealous in all other things, rais'd a Commotion in the Town against the Professors of Christianity, as we are told by *S. Luke*. This appears by the Opposition which we find in the same History, of the Jews of *Berea*, another City of *Macedonia*, to those of *Thessalonica*. These, says the Historian, were more noble than those of *Thessalonica*, in that they receiv'd the Word with all readiness of mind, and search'd the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so; therefore many of them believed. If those of *Thessalonica* had Love enough for the Truth to do as much, they would not have been less ready to receive their Reasons who preach'd the Gospel to 'em. But the Laziness that detain'd them in Judaism, join'd to their other Passions, kept them from examining the Doctrine of *S. Paul*, and consequently they acknowledg'd not the Truth of it.

The present Jews who live among the Christians, and perhaps a part of the Mahometans, may neglect the Examen of Christianity out of divers Principles, such as those we have describ'd in the preceding Chapters; but I'm very apt to believe that they mix with them a great deal of that Laziness we are treating of in this Chapter.

Chapter. They are out of Love with all Meditation and Discussion ; nor can there be a better Proof of it, than that they vouchsafe not even to examine why they give Credit to Judaism or Mahometanism. Being altogether busy about sensible Objects and the Cares of Life, they cannot without Reluctancy think seriously and attentively of any other Subject. They may be compar'd to People extremely weary after walking a great way on foot, but desir'd to take a longer Walk to refresh and divert themselves. They would not hearken, be sure, to such a Proposition, but indulging themselves in the Pleasure of Repose, they would think of no other thing except quietly enjoying their Rest. Thus, such as are busy about the Affairs of Life, and fatigu'd with the perpetual Cares they occasion, are lazy as to all other things.

Christianity being at this time divided into several Sects, whereof some must necessarily be in an Error, may we not therefore place in the Number of the Lazy those Persons, who, full of all other Things but the Love of the Truth, have never carefully examin'd which of these Sects is most conformable to the Sentiments of the Apostles? I own that divers other Motives might lead them to remain, without knowing why themselves, in that Party wherein they happen'd to be born,

and to condemn all others without vouchsafing to examine their Tenets; but if you remark it well, it will appear that one of the Principles which occasion this Conduct is a certain lazy Aversion to the Trouble of searching after the Truth in Matters of this kind.

We may proceed yet further, seeing there are People who condemn not only their native Religion without having ever sufficiently studied it, but likewise all other Religions, tho still less known to them: because first perswading themselves that they have discover'd some Falsity therein, they conclude next that all the rest is of the same Nature; and so can never resolve upon seriously or thoroughly examining the Truth. After having found out, as they think, that the ablest Men they know teach a false Doctrine for a Gospel-Truth, they judg by this Sample of the Religion of their own Country as well as of all others: and that Laziness which keeps 'em as it were enchanted, makes 'em think it more convenient to condemn all without any more ado, than to ingage in a solicitous enquiry after the true Principles of Christianity.

I have already shewn the Danger and Unreasonableness of this Laziness; nor are there any Persons who disagree to it: but when they would actually get quit of this Passion, they find themselves so much
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prejudic'd in favour of it, that they have need of their utmost Endeavours to be cur'd, or to form an opposite Habit. Besides all I have hitherto said, we ought to reflect upon the Pleasure of being in a contrary Disposition to this idle Temper, which is not only infinitely more satisfactory, but likewise much more reasonable ; and it may happen that the Love of Truth would be preferr'd to a shameful Quiet, worthier of Beasts than Men.

Let us imagine now such a lazy Person as we have been speaking of, and let us compare his Condition to that of a Man whose Mind being accustom'd to Enquiry, finds no Repose except in the certain Knowledg of the Truth. The first having perceiv'd some false Doctrine which was taught him as a true one (for we may grant this to several of the lazy Unbelievers) he rejects this Doctrine, and whatever else is affirm'd to be true concerning Religion, without considering that important Truths might be mix'd with Falsehoods in the Theology of his Country ; or that there may be People perhaps elsewhere exempted from those Errors that were taught him ; or finally, that the Doctrine of the first Founders of Christianity might have been misunderstood. Common Sense would teach a Man to suspend his Judgment at least, till he had examin'd these three Heads. But for this

there is more Caution and Moderation requisite than Unbelievers commonly have, who, looking upon such an Examen to be impossible, chuse rather to deny all at once. This is just as if any Reader, because he had discover'd by chance an Error in some Historian, would immediately conclude, without reading any further, that the whole was pure Romance, and that there was no such thing in the World as a true History.

Notwithstanding such a ridiculous and hasty Judgment, Unbelievers seem to live in as profound a Tranquillity, as a Man could do who knew by Mathematical Demonstrations that all Religions were false. They appear to have so great an Indifference for Truth in this respect, as if it did not concern them to know it. They are ready, while in this Disposition, to do whatever may render the Enjoyments of Life more pleasing, nor will they hear a word of examining; and they indulge themselves in those Pleasures as far as they judg it possible without doing 'em any harm. It is plain then that this Opinion opens a Door to numberless secret Crimes, and gives Encouragement in publick to all that can be practis'd with Safety. I will not insist upon it, that such People are bad Friends, bad Subjects, or bad Citizens, because they sacrifice every thing to their Pleasures; I shall only remark,

mark, that being no way certain of the Truth of Religion, or that God would have 'em to be of any Religion, they can enjoy no other Quiet but what must be an Effect of the most notorious Folly imaginable. They are, according to their own Judgment, every Moment in a Condition of parting for ever with what they love, and which to acquire or preserve has frequently occasion'd 'em infinite Trouble. This Loss may happen by a thousand unforeseen Accidents, and at last it is sure to come unavoidably by Death, beyond which they expect nothing. Nevertheless they live securely. They behave themselves much worse than a Man would do, who being seriously told that he is condemn'd to Death, but that there were Means of escaping it if he would be at the Pains to know them; and yet would think of nothing but diverting himself, without vouchsafing to give Attention to what was said to him, tho with the Hazard of losing his Life, in case those Advisers whom he would not believe spoke Truth. If what Christianity tells us be indeed true, there are Pains infinitely surpassing Death to be fear'd by such as reject it; and yet Unbelievers who have no Certainty that these things are not true, rest securely in their Infidelity and Laziness, without informing themselves any further. In good Truth such as live in this
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Disposition, and who imagine themselves exalted above the Vulgar, are not in this respect much elevated above the Brutes, which are only concern'd about the present.

Now, on the contrary, let us suppose a Man who has well study'd the Principles of true Christianity, satisfy'd in himself with the Truths he has discover'd, he observes the Precepts they enjoin him with all Tranquillity in this Life, and after Death he expects the Reward of his Faith, with a Contentment of Mind that cannot be equall'd. The most refin'd Reason, and the Laws of the Society wherein Men must necessarily live with one another, requires nothing of him, but he obeys it without hesitating; and whatever befalls him, he looks upon Death only as a Passage to a much better Life than this. I dare affirm something beyond all this; and it is, that supposing this Man deceiv'd, yet his Condition would be infinitely more desirable than that of such, as refusing to examine Religion, reject it nevertheless with the Hazard of losing themselves for ever, and are withal in a perpetual Fear (if not quite bewitched with their Incredulity and Laziness) of losing for ever all that is dear to them.

It is therefore infinitely more reasonable and more sure both for this and the other Life, if there be one, to search af-
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ter Truth, and to examine the Proofs of Religion, than to live and die in the most extravagant Carelessness imaginable. This is all that I desire should be granted me here, and that cannot be deny'd me by any, without acting against the clearest Evidence of common Sense. Those who refuse to believe the Truth of the Christian Religion, ought carefully to examine themselves, and see whether this Laziness I have describ'd be not at least in some part the Cause of their Incredulity. This Examination is of the utmost Importance, there is nothing to be lost by making of it, and you risk all by neglecting it.

The CONCLUSION of the first Part.

I Have describ'd in the preceding Chapters those Dispositions and Motives contrary to Reason, which might bring Unbelievers to reject the Christian Religion. Altho I have consider'd these different Dispositions one after another, and have distinguish'd them by particular Characters, I am not of opinion however that they act separately upon any, or that there are Unbelievers who may be reproach'd only with one of these Faults. There is not any questionless that is not at the same time guilty of several of them ;
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but there are such as may be more culpable in one than in another. Immorality makes one an Infidel; in another 'tis Pride that chiefly opposes it self to the Light of Truth: You see some blinded by their Prejudices which they take for undoubted Maxims; there are others who do not reason well, or neglect informing themselves of what they should learn, or whom Laziness keeps from entring upon a Discussion, which to them appears too tedious and painful. And perhaps there be those in whom all these Faults may meet in some degree, tho but one of them may be their predominant Passion. There is likewise infinite Variety in Mens Genius and Understandings with respect to their good or bad Qualities, and their different Conjunctions.

Did we meet with Unbelievers who could say, that they renounc'd the Truths of the Gospel for no other end, but to follow the most conformable Principles to sound Reason, and to live in a more regular manner, or more useful to Society; and could we meet with any of them exempted from the Faults I have describ'd, it might then be justly said, that my Enumeration of the internal Motives of Incredulity was not sufficient, but I take it for granted that there is not one Unbeliever, in whom several of these Defects are not remarkable, and I take their own
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Consciencēs to witness. They are herein to do Justice to themselves: for such as exhort them, as I do, get nothing by it, but only the Satisfaction of performing their Duty; nor can the Unbelievers lose any thing by examining, if they are not in some of those Conditions by me describ'd. If they are oblig'd to own themselves in the wrong, what risk can they run by reforming? and if after a serious Discussion they find me deceiv'd, they'l have Reason to be more satisfy'd with their own Conduct. The Time they shall lay out upon this Disquisition cannot be counted lost or vainly spent, seeing the Matter in Debate is the most important thing in the World, and that the Discovery of Truth must at all times necessarily produce Joy, Satisfaction and Tranquillity; or augment them, if enjoy'd already.

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The Second Part.

Of the Motives of Incredulity which proceed from the Occasions given Unbelievers to doubt of the Christian Religion, or entirely to reject it.

CHAP. I.

That the Truth of the Christian Religion ought not to be call'd in question, because some embrace it more from Credulity than Reason.

ALtho, as I have already said, there is no Unbeliever but is in some blameable Disposition which inclines him to reject the Christian Religion, it must be confess'd however that there are many other things whereof they cannot be accus'd, but which nevertheless confirm them in these Dispositions. 'Tis true that it is ill done of them

them to forsake the Truth upon any Account whatsoever, but they are not much less to be blam'd who furnish 'em with the Occasions of doing so. I have undertaken to shew the one and the other in this Second Part, where, granting to Unbelievers that many of them who profess Christianity are in the wrong in several things, I shall demonstrate that it no way follows from thence that the Christian Religion is not true, and that we ought not to attribute to the first Teachers of it, those Faults which we remark at this Day in some of those who call themselves their Disciples. The Occasions which the latter give Unbelievers to conceive an ill Opinion of Religion, proceed either from the Persons or from the things themselves. I shall forthwith examine those which the Persons give, and afterwards such as proceed from Things.

One of the most general and common Scandals which occasions the Obstinacy of Unbelievers is, that they see a world of People who are Christians not from Reason and Understanding, but from their Education, and out of mere Credulity. If these had been born in *Asia*, they would, without changing their Disposition, be Idolaters or Mahometans; and as zealously embrace the idle Dreams of the Bramins, or the Errors of *Mahomet*, as they believe in *Europe* that the Christian
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Religion is true. They receive Fables that are manifestly ridiculous with no less Respect than the most certain Histories ; and they believe not less the most pernicious Doctrines and the most contrary to the Good of Mankind, than the holiest and most useful Precepts of the Gospel. It is not the Nature of the Objects laid open by the Teachers of Religion to their Understanding, which determines these to believe 'em true, or to look upon them with Respect ; but it is the Authority of those who speak to them well or ill-grounded, and a certain Credulity carefully cherish'd in their Minds, because of the Advantages drawn by some from it, as we shall shew in the Sequel.

Deceiv'd by a faint Resemblance, they call their *Credulity* by the Name of *Faith*, and maintain that those want it who believe not as they do all that is told 'em by their Preachers, and consequently that they have not such a Disposition as the Gospel requires of Men, seeing it promises Salvation only to those who have *Faith*. If any Person reasons about Religion, and says that it can neither be known nor prov'd without Reasoning, presently these People, who neither know the Proofs nor the Doctrines of it but very confusedly, are sure to suspect him of Irreligion, especially if he forsakes any of the common Sentiments, the Falsity whereof he may have

have discover'd by his Application and study. These People so much perswaded, if you believe them, of the Truth of Christianity, cannot believe many times that a Man who knows how to reason well should embrace it in good earnest, and they are alarm'd at the least Examination of it.

In the mean time, the Unbelievers who hear these Discourses, and behold this Conduct so visibly repugnant to common Sense, laugh at this pretended Faith, and draw from it this unhappy Consequence, that the Doctrine to be receiv'd so credulously is either false, or at least to be extremely suspected.

Thus the Heathens formerly hearing the Christians say, *that they needed only to believe in order to be sav'd*; and not understanding what this meant, * laugh'd in * Origen. like manner at the Christian Religion, as cont. Cels. if none could receive it but credulous Persons, and such as were not capable of reasoning. And indeed if it had for a main Principle this Doctrine, *That People must embrace it without knowing why, and that such as should thus believe it should be sav'd*: If they had maintain'd this, I say, the Preachers of this Religion might be justly suspected of Imposture, and those who receiv'd it, without being able to render any Reason, be condemn'd as too credulous. To speak in such Terms would con-

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found Religion with all sorts of Impostures, which are only establish'd upon the Credulity of the People: It would likewise open a Door to all the Falshoods that could be told, if Belief were all that was requisite; for there could be no Reason to receive one thing without Examen no more than another. Were this so, how could the Christians boast of being certain of the Truth of their Religion, and the Falsty of others; since the Belief of all Religions would be built upon the same Credulity?

But 'tis false that the Christian Religion requires Assent without Examination, or that it is grounded upon a blind Faith. It is also false, that such as receive it upon those scores can pass for Christians whose Faith is praise-worthy.

To be certain of the first of these two things we need but consider the Conduct and Discourses of Jesus Christ. Had he come into the World without any Character to distinguish him from Impostors who have frequently impos'd upon the Credulous; was he to be believ'd merely upon his own Word, or had he requir'd any such thing, the Jews would have done well to reject him. Nay, and had he in very deed been sent of God, if he did not offer cogent Proofs of it, no body could be blam'd for not believing on him: for then such as were the most perswaded of the

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the Truth of the Jewish Religion, and therefore the best dispos'd to embrace the Doctrine of those Prophets God would be pleas'd to send to them, could not, without hazard of deceiving themselves, acknowledg any Man to be effectually a Prophet, who could give them no evident Marks of his Mission.

Therefore Jesus Christ came arm'd with the Power of working Miracles, and he wrought so great a Number, if you credit the Evangelists, that he infinitely surpass'd all the Prophets who were before him. Now this is the Mark which *Moses* taught the Israelites should discover the true Prophets, and Jesus Christ grounded himself upon it when he requir'd Assent to his Doctrine. He never desir'd any to believe in him purely upon his Word, as it may be seen by divers Passages in the Gospels.

If I bear Witness of my self, says he, my Joh. 5. 31.
Witness is not true, that is, it cannot be
look'd upon as true, unless there be some
other Proofs of it besides my saying so.
Then, after telling that John Baptist had
bore him witness, he adds, I have a greater Ver. 36.
Witness than that of John; for the Works
which the Father hath given me to finish, the
same Works that I do bear witness of me, that
the Father hath sent me. He further says to
those that desir'd him to declare if he
were the Christ, *The Works that I do in my*

- Ch. 10. 25. *Father's Name bear Witness of me: and a little lower, If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, tho you believe not me, believe the Works.* What can be said more to the purpose than what you meet with in the same Gospel, viz. If
- Ver. 37. *I had not done amongst 'em the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin?* By this it appears clearly that the Author of the Christian Religion did not require Assent to his bare Word.
- Ch. 15. 24. *I had not done amongst 'em the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin?*

His Apostles have acted just after the same manner; for they did not only affirm that they had seen the Miracles of their Master, or that he had spoken to them from Heaven after his Ascension; but they have also join'd to their Testimony all the Marks of Truth that could be possibly desir'd. Their Doctrine consider'd in it self did not afford the least Occasion to suspect Imposture; they could not expect any temporal Advantage by publishing it; on the contrary they met every where with an obstinate Resistance from the Jews and Heathens; they were ill us'd every Moment, and walk'd in perpetual Dangers: In a word, many of 'em suffer'd Death for constantly persevering in the Profession of the Truth. And to accumulate Proofs, they wrought Miracles like to those of Jesus Christ, as he promis'd them they should before he left them. The Incredulous will object perhaps

haps that I beg the Question by supposing the Truth of what is doubted of; but my Design is not now to infer any Consequences from these Facts in favour of the Christian Religion: I only conclude from hence that the Apostles did not preach a blind Faith or Obedience, as some Christians do at this time: One of them exhorts those to whom he writes, *not to believe every Spirit, but to try the Spirits whether they be of God, because many false Prophets were gone out into the World.* Another advises them, *to try all things, and to hold fast that which is best.* 1 John 4. 1. 1 Thess. 5. 21.

It cannot be said therefore that such as cry up implicate Faith do act according to the Genius of Christianity; nor can the ridiculous Pretences of those who require Assent to their say-so, be justly attributed to Jesus Christ or his Apostles. It may be demanded of me here perhaps, what that *Faith* is which is so much commended in the Writings of Christ's Disciples. This is not the proper Place of discussing this Subject thoroughly, nor will I meddle with any more of it than is absolutely necessary to solve this Difficulty. *Faith*, as we have said before, being not an implicate Belief, consists first in assenting to good Proofs, that is, as strong Proofs as the Nature of the thing will bear. For instance, A Man affirms himself to be sent of God, he preaches a certain Doctrine

to me, which he confirms by Miracles. Immediately I examine this Doctrine in it self, without regard to any Prejudices, and without considering whether it be conformable to my present Disposition or not; and if I find that it contains nothing false, I conclude it may possibly come from God. Then I proceed to the Miracles, and if I see 'em wrought, or if I find the Truth of them attested by Persons worthy of Credit, I cannot doubt but God has actually sent this Man.

Those who are capable of making this Examen as they ought, are worthy of great Praise; for in the first place they must quit all their Prejudices, and consider what is propos'd to them, not as it relates to themselves, but with respect to the eternal Laws of Truth and Falshood. Secondly, they must have a great Love for the Truth to go through with an Examination, whose Consequences may prove very opposite to their temporal Interests, as I have shewn in the first Part of this Work. There are Times and Places when a Man cannot declare himself perswaded of the Truth of the Gospel, without exposing himself to most cruel Persecutions; and it may be said, that the Commands of Christ cannot be exactly observed by us any where almost, without drawing upon our selves the Hatred and Contempt of such as disobey them, that is,

is, of the greatest Part of Men. So that to be a good Christian, there is more Courage and Resolution necessary than is commonly imagin'd; nor can it therefore be doubted, but that Faith, such as the Gospel requires of us, is a very great Virtue.

It is also deserving of much Commendation, if we consider that it is never found but in Minds well-dispos'd. It engages us not only to believe that he who speaks to us in the Name of God, and adds sufficient Proofs of it, has been really so sent, but also to expect great things of God for the future, grounding our selves upon the Proofs he exhibits of his Power. Those who saw the Persons brought to Life again by Jesus Christ, who saw himself after his Resurrection, and who could not doubt of the Truth of these Miracles, were oblig'd from hence to a firm Perswasion of what he taught them concerning the general Resurrection of all Men. I'm of opinion that no reasonable Man will look upon the last as impossible, if he holds the first to be true; for there is no greater Difficulty in raising an hundred than one again: and it could not, without Folly, be said by any, that God's Power was all spent upon those first Effects of it they had seen. Nevertheless, Men being accusom'd to believe nothing but what they learn from their own Experience, can

scarcely be perswaded of any thing without seeing some Examples of it. He must be a Person of Discernment and good Sense who draws such a Consequence as I have mention'd; and he must also have some Equity, to expect for the future such great things from the Marks that God has given of his Power. An unjust and obstinate Man will believe nothing except what he sees, and has no regard to any thing but the present.

It cannot be deny'd therefore, but that such an enlightn'd and understanding Faith as we have describ'd, is a most commendable Disposition of Mind, and most agreeable to the purest Light of Reason. But here I foresee an Objection, *viz.* I shall be told that I have describ'd the Faith of such as had seen the Miracles of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, and not their Faith who live at this time. To this I answer, that what I have said of the Perswasion of such as have seen those Miracles, may be easily apply'd to them that now will examine the Proofs we have that such Miracles were really perform'd. To assent to these Proofs one must be in a Disposition like to theirs who first embrac'd Christianity, by seeing the Miracles of its Founders. Nay, in some sense it may be said, that such as relish those Proofs, and draw from them their natural Consequences, ought to be better dispos'd than those who
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were the Eye-witnesses of the Actions of Christ and his Apostles; because what is seen makes an Impression upon the most ignorant Persons; whereas abstracted Proofs require more Penetration and Love of Truth than most Men have. This is the Reason that Jesus Christ speaking to St. Thomas, who without he saw him Joh. 20. 29 would not believe his Resurrection, says to him, *Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou believest; Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* He accus'd him of Obstinacy, because having no just Occasion of suspecting any Fraud in the other Apostles who affirm'd they had seen their Master, yet he would not believe them. If this Disposition be blameable, as indeed it is, we must on the other hand commend their Disposition, who, without seeing, assent to sufficient Reasons. St. Peter therefore praises those Christians to whom he wrote, because *they loved Jesus Christ whom they had not seen, and because they believed in him, tho then they saw him not.* 1 Pet. 1. 8.

It will be easily granted perhaps that Docility, the contrary Disposition to Obstinacy, is very praise-worthy; but it may be said to me, that the knowing Faith which proceeds from it, must be a very rare thing, compar'd to the blind Faith I condemn. It is well known that there are few Men of all Qualities and Condi-
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ons fit to examine throughly such Proofs as our Belief is built upon, and that do not judg of the Cause before understanding it. From thence it must follow, some will say, that you deny to a great many those Commendations which you bestow upon discerning Faith. The most simple, and these are such as were thought fittest to receive the Gospel, are not capable to examine their Proofs, and so excluded, according to you, from the Kingdom of Heaven.

These Difficulties, I confess, appear specious at first sight, but at bottom have no Solidity. *First*; I agree that true Faith is a thing infinitely more rare than Credulity or Infidelity, and herein I do but follow the Doctrine of the Gospel, which Mat. 20. 16 says, *that many are called but few chosen.* & 17. 14. That Vertue which the Gospel requires of Men is not a thing commonly met with, no more than extraordinary Knowledg. Nor ought the Incredulous to wonder that the Description I have made of the true Faith agrees but to very few People. On the contrary, we might suspect the Sincerity of the first Teachers of Christianity, had they taught a Doctrine fit to draw in a great Multitude without Knowledg or Vertue, promising them Salvation notwithstanding their Ignorance and Vices. It would have been said not without Reason, that they only design'd to gain

gain the Multitude, and to augment the Number of their Followers. But the Author of the Christian Religion has said, *that strait is the Gate of Salvation, and that they are few who enter it.* Mat. 7. 14.

Secondly; The Simple, or the Babes whom the Gospel commends, are not ignorant or stupid Men, who have no Relish of Truth. They are not self-conceited Persons, they are troubl'd with few Prejudices, and are ready to embrace Truth and Virtue when offer'd or taught them. On the contrary, the wise and prudent, who are not fit to receive the Gospel, are Men puffed up with pretended Knowledg, full of Prejudices, and so dispos'd as to reject whatever is not conformable to their Ideas, and their present Condition. Such were the Priests and Scribes of the Jews, and most of the best Quality of that Nation. They were so strongly perswaded that there could not be imagin'd a better way of serving God than that which they learnt from *Moses*, and that there was no Theology more excellent than their own; that to offer at undeceiving them was enough to procure their Hatred and Indignation. Moreover, they were not Persons who knew how to reason strictly, or that had exact Ideas of Theology and Morals. The Law of *Moses* explain'd by their Teachers, and their Traditions good or bad, made up all their Knowledg.

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Jesus Christ calls 'em Wise and Prudent, only because they were commonly thought so. On the other hand, such as he calls Babes, were People look'd upon by the Doctors of the Law as Children in comparison of the Learned; but that indeed were much more capable of relishing Truth than they, because they were neither blinded with Prejudices, nor fill'd with a high Conceit of themselves. They were also Men of good Sense, very competent Judges of the Truth of Christ's Miracles, and the Sanctity of his Doctrine.

Something of this nature may be met with every Day in those Places where Theology is corrupted by the Errors that are mix'd with it. Let any address himself to an unlearned Person, but of good Sense and Morals, he can be easily persuaded that the Divinity of his Country is erroneous: He shall very well perceive the Force of a good Argument, and yields Assent to Truth as soon as he knows it. Go on the contrary, and propose the same thing to a Divine, there is no wrangling Shifts nor Chicaneries that he has not recourse to, rather than acknowledg the Truth; and his pretended Learning contributes often to render the clearest Truths obscure to him. In the mean time, if you would represent to him the Example of one amongst the Vulgar, who had

had been convinc'd by your Reasons, he would treat him immediately as an ignorant or fickle Fellow, altho he had much more Sense and Integrity than himself. This is what Jesus Christ remark'd when he said, *I thank thee, O Father, because thou* Mat. 11.
hast hidden these things from the Wise and 25.
Prudent, and hast reveal'd them unto Babes.

But some will press upon me harder, it may be, and ask what I think of that great Number of People, who not only have no sort of Learning, but that cannot conceive an Argument of two Lines, that understand not the Proofs of Christianity, that consequently are not capable of examining them, and that nevertheless profess to believe in Jesus Christ.

Altho an infinite Number of People be comprehended under the Name of rude and ignorant Persons, we must however acknowledg that there are several Degrees and Sorts of Ignorance. They cannot be all exactly distinguish'd, but this is not necessary to answer the Question propos'd. I shall remark in the first place, that those rude and ignorant Persons who are Men of ill Morals, and continue such, are not of their Number whose Faith is acceptable to God, tho they make Profession of believing in Jesus Christ. He will make no more account of 'em for this, than if they had been in a quite opposite Perswasion; and 'tis certain that no Ignorance can excuse

cuse them, as we could easily shew. Secondly, if Men not of such ill Morals, at least not in so scandalous a manner, should embrace the Gospel out of pure Credulity, as they would receive the contrary were they taught it, 'tis evident this is not the Faith so much extoll'd by the Gospel. A Proof whereof is, that those People ordinarily change from black to white, according as they alter their Minds who have the Conduct of their Consciences. Nor do I well know whether such Men can be properly said to be of any Opinion: for they have no Conception of what is never so little abstracted, and only conform themselves externally to those for whom they have a Respect.

But among those that may be term'd gross and ignorant Persons, there are some who, without any Learning, have much Uprightness and Integrity of Mind, which makes them admire and receive the Truths of the Gospel as soon as propos'd to them, tho they are not always capable to express clearly all that they think. The Beauty of the Evangelick Morals makes a great Impression upon such Men, and easily gains their Souls; and as they discover nothing in the other Doctrines of Christianity that shocks their Notions or Desires, they cordially embrace them, and constantly persevere to believe them. This Disposition and Carriage is certainly
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very commendable, and conformable to the Doctrine of Jesus Christ. Such were, for example, the Apostles, before they were extraordinarily illuminated. The Miracles and Discourses of Jesus Christ gain'd them in a small time; and the more they continu'd with him, the more they admir'd him, altho they were still prepossess'd with some Jewish Errors.

We may place also in this Rank the Publicans and Women of ill Lives, who were converted by seeing the Miracles and hearing the Doctrine of Christ. There are a world of People of this sort, who are for a time drawn into an evil and shameful manner of Life by seducing Temptations, and the Force of certain Conjunctions; but all the while the Love of Truth and Vertue is not quite extinguish'd in them. And this is the Reason that when Providence lays the one or the other before them in a sensible and touching way, as in the time of Jesus Christ, and upon a thousand other Occasions, they forthwith renounce their Immoralities, and zealously take up the opposite Method of Living.

At this Day such as truly believe in Christ, and that are not capable of making long Deductions, have not indeed the same Advantages as the Apostles had, and the other Disciples, who saw those Miracles wrought which convinc'd them, without

out much reasoning, of the Truth of his Mission, and the Divinity of his Doctrine. But the Doctrine of Jesus Christ being always the same, the Holiness of its Precepts recommends them as much as ever to the understanding of such as are not quite corrupted with the bad Customs of the Age. We see every day the Excellency and Usefulness of them, whether we consider them as practis'd by others, or remark the Disorders which accompany all ways of living opposite to them. To perceive this, there is need only of a little Vertue and good Sense. On the other hand, if we cast our Eye upon the Doctrines contain'd in the Gospel, and which solely tend to lead us to the Observation of its Precepts, to procure us eternal Happiness, there is nothing herein but what is worthy of God, especially if they be drawn out of those Fountains which the Subtlety of Modern Divines has not corrupted. Nor does the History of the first Establishment of the Gospel contain any thing but what is conformable to the Doctrine of it, and proper to perswade us of its Truth. This History written in so plain and natural a Method, carries in it self all the Characters of Sincerity; insomuch that in reading of it, one has not the least Suspicion to make him doubt, whether the Writers of it believ'd it or not. The most part of the Matters of
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Fact mention'd in it are of such a Nature that few could be deceiv'd about them. All this join'd together is more than sufficient to perswade a Man whom Vice, or I know not what Science falsely so call'd, hath not blinded: and the Difficulties which the Incredulous find in them proceed rather from their Disposition of Mind than from the things themselves.

It is indeed true that the Persons we speak of are not capable to judg of those subtle and perplex'd Questions which divide the Divines. But it cannot be said neither, that the distinct Belief of Doctrines above the reach of a discreet and sincere Man that loves Vertue, tho he has no Learning; it cannot be affirm'd, I say, that such a distinct Belief is necessary to his Salvation. Every Man that loves the Truth, that according to his best Understanding embraces all that he conceives in the Gospel, that orders his Life by what he believes, and that endeavours as much as possible he can to encrease his Knowledge, does all that is requisite to obtain Salvation from the Mercy of God, according to the Ideas we have of it from the Gospel. For it may be said, that this Man improves the Talents he receiv'd as much as God indispensibly requires it of him; and nothing hinders, but we may apply to him what Jesus Christ said in the Parable; *Good and faithful Servant, thou hast* Mat. 25. 23
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been

been faithful over a few things, I will make thee Ruler over many things : enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.

If it be objected to me further, that there are some who are not by any means capable to see in the Morals of the Gospel, in its other Doctrines, and in the History of it, that Usefulness, Excellence and Sincerity which I said might be remark'd therein, and nevertheless believe it to be true ; I have nothing to reply to this but what I have said already. These People imitate others, but they have not that Faith which the Gospel demands. It is not calculated indeed for the Learned alone, but no more is it for Brutes. Such as understand not, or are suppos'd not capable to understand any thing of it, should become Men before they think of being Christians ; for there is no great Difference between them and the Savages of *Africa* or *America*.

So I may conclude that the Incredulous do calumniate the Christian Religion when they accuse it of requiring from Men a blind Credulity, and to condemn Examination. It has been shewn that there is nothing more false, by Reasons, if I'm not mistaken, that can never be answer'd.

C H A P. II.

That the Immorality or Ignorance of those who sometimes shew the greatest Zeal for Religion, ought not to render it suspected to the Incredulous.

THE Christian Religion demanded not only that it should be thought true, but also that this Belief be externally profess'd, and that a Man let no Opportunity slip of shewing others by his Life and Discourse that he's firmly perswaded of it. 'Tis by no means a speculative Science to continue lock'd up in the Memory, without bearing any Fruit out of it, and without appearing in their manner of Living who are convinc'd of its Truth. It fills them with a certain Ardour for the Observation of what it commands, that the true Christians are easily perceiv'd to be in earnest. 'Tis this Disposition that is call'd Zeal from a Greek Word which signifies Jealousy, to shew that we ought not to have less Ardour for the Honour of Christianity than a Bridegroom should be concern'd to preserve that of his Bride.

This Zeal extends generally to all the Doctrines, and to all the Precepts of the

Gospel, and not to some of them only. We ought zealously to defend the Truths we learn from it, otherwise it were to betray and equal it to Falshood; nor ought we to manifest less Ardour in observing its Injunctions, seeing this is not less essential than the Belief of its Doctrines. The one and the other must be joined; for Christianity is entirely ruin'd, if those things be separated which the Author of it has united. The Reason of this is, that the Doctrines lead us to the Observation of the Precepts, being reveal'd to us for this end; and the Observation of the Precepts does indispensibly suppose a strong Perswasion of the Doctrines.

All Christians are agreed about this Principle, and Jesus Christ and his Apostles are very express about it, so that there is no necessity to prove it. Nevertheless, it is evident that such as shew the greatest Zeal for the Christian Doctrines, and for the way of explaining them in their Country, are frequently seen to violate the clearest Precepts of it after a most scandalous manner, as if this Ardour they shew for the Defence of the Doctrines were all that the Gospel requires of Men.

There are some People, for instance, whose Discourses breathe nothing else, one would think, but the Love of the Truth, and the Desire of preserving the Knowledge

ledg of it, and of propagating it amongst Men. They write in favour of it, they defend it with much heat against opposite Errors, and they stick at no difficulty to make Truth triumph over Falshood. Nay, they expose themselves sometimes to Dangers for this with a surprizing Courage. But these very same People who seem entirely devoted to the Service of God, and the Defence of Religion, are sometimes altogether intractable, when a Man has any Dealings with them. Selfish, proud, deceitful, Slanderers, uncharitable, and breaking most of the Commandments regarding their Neighbour, they imagine themselves the best Christians in the World; and the ignorant or corrupt Multitude looks upon 'em as in effect good Men. Such were in Christ's time the Pharisees, whose Zeal for the Law we read of in the Gospel, where at the same time they are represented as a very ill sort of Men. There are too many such at this time, and every Country will furnish frequent Examples to all that have a mind to make their Observations. What St. Paul said long ago to the hypocritical Jews, may be now said to many People; *You that make your boast of the Law, by breaking the Law, dishonour God; for the Name of God is blasphem'd among the Gentiles through you.* Rom. 2.23

The Unbelievers who take notice of these Men, draw a Consequence very inju-

rious to the Christian Religion ; which is, that seeing those who pass for the Pillars of Religion, who have sometimes the best Employments, and who are in most Esteem, are such ill People, the Religion it self is but a mere Artifice to deceive the Simple, and to cover their Passions under a Pretence which gains 'em Respect : For in a word, all that the Zealous do, if you believe 'em, is for no other end but the Service of God. Thus Unbelievers come to imagine that the Beauty of the Christian Morals, which they cannot deny, is only a fine Idea to impose the more easily upon such as are not always upon their Guard. They are much talk'd of, say they, but the most Zealous observe no more of them than serves their turn. They would have others, perhaps, obey them exactly, that they might get by it, but as for themselves they laugh at them. You'll hear those, for example, preach Charity and Impartiality, who have neither the one nor the other, but are wonderfully pleas'd to find those they have to do with not selfish or uncharitable, because it makes for their Advantage.

This is what Unbelievers say, and they are never unfurnish'd with Examples to cite about all the Christian Vertues, whereof there is not one that has not been violated by some Zealot, and many times without doing him any Injury in the Opinion

nion of the World, because this Appearance of Zeal covers all Defects.

The Fact we deny not, and we may add further, that Jesus Christ and his Apostles have foreseen it, by exalting that Charity which is principally violated by this false Zeal, above not only Orthodoxy, but even the highest Knowledge, and the Power of working Miracles it self. Not every one that cries unto me, *Lord,* Mat. 7. 21. *Lord,* says Jesus Christ, that is, who makes Profession of the Truth of my Doctrine, *shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.* Many will say to me in that day, *Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy Name? and in thy Name have cast out Devils? and in thy Name have done many wonderful Works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me you that work Iniquity.* This is a manifest Admonition which the Author of the Christian Religion gives to his Disciples, to prevent the evil Example of pretended Zealots making any Impression upon them. St. Paul likewise expresses himself upon this occasion in such emphatical terms, that it was not possible for him to speak more home: *Tho I speak,* says he, *with the* 1 Cor. 13. 1 *Tongues of Men and Angels, and have not Charity, I'm become as a sounding Brass, or a tinkling Cymbal. And tho I have the Gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries,*

and all Knowledg: and tho I have all Faith, so that I could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing. And tho I bestow all my Goods to feed the Poor, and tho I give my Body to be burned, and have not Charity, it profiteth me nothing.

It appears plainly hereby that the Carriage of pretended Zealots is directly contrary to the Principles of the Gospel, as I have shewn from the beginning of this Chapter. This may serve for an Answer to Unbelievers, who cannot, without Injustice, confound some Persons Abuse of Religion with Religion it self. If any pretended to have very much study'd a certain Science, and that it appear'd by some of his Discourses that he understood nothing of it, could it be concluded from thence that this Science was only a Chimera? No body durst maintain it. But 'tis just thus with the Christian Religion, and such as are carry'd away with a false Zeal.

The Incredulous object further, that since those who shew the greatest Zeal observe not the most important Precepts of this Religion, 'tis at least a sign that they are not themselves perswaded of its Truth; for otherwise, say they, they would not quit the best part of it, seeing, if the speculative Doctrines be true, what concerns Practice is not less so. But if the most zealous are not perswaded of their

their Religion, what may be judg'd of its Proofs?

This is certainly a Prejudice that is very difficultly conquer'd in the Minds of those who have more regard to what is said than to what is done, and who look upon Mens *Morals* as the Character of their Belief. Every Person has not strength of Thought enough to consider the Laws of the Gospel in themselves, without any respect to the manner how they are obey'd, or to the Judgment that Christians seem to make of them by their Conduct. But at bottom this is an ill-grounded Prejudice, from which no Consequence can be inferr'd against the Truth of the Christian Religion, as it will appear by the following Remarks.

First of all, we may grant that there are some of those Zealots in shew for a part of the Christian Doctrines, who are not in effect perswaded of any of them, and who make use of the Cloak of Religion to impose upon the Multitude, the better to carry on their Affairs in the World. But does it follow from hence that the Christian Religion is not true? By no means; since it is evident that these Men may be deceiv'd as well as others. They are not always such as make the greatest Noise about an Art that best understand it. And if all the Discourses of these People were well examin'd, it might be easily

easily perceiv'd that the Christian Religion has Beauties to which they are utter Strangers. There might be also remark'd in their Dispositions some invincible Obstacles to the sincere Acknowledgment of the Truth of Christianity, which is entirely contrary to those Dispositions. The greatest part of these People believe, for example, that Force must be made use of to establish Truth, and that the Magistrates who favour them ought to use those hardly that are not of their Sentiments. Nay, they maintain, that without this Christianity is lost, and that all other Religions shall triumph over it. All had been still Pagan, according to them, if *Constantine* and the other succeeding Christian Emperors had not employ'd their Authority to destroy Heathenism. Now what other thing can such Discourses mean, but that they are Strangers to the true Proofs of Christianity, as well as to the Spirit of Charity and Moderation, which is the Life and Soul of the Gospel? Those who have well study'd these Proofs, and carefully examin'd all the Parts whereof the Christian Religion is made up, find it so well grounded, its Promises so becoming God and Men, and its Precepts so useful to humane Society, that to make it wholly triumph over Error, it is enough in their Judgment to obtain a Liberty of preaching it, and that such as profess it may

may incur no Danger for so doing; in a word, that it may oppose the contrary Opinions with equal Arms. These Persons animated with that Spirit of Moderation, whereof I spoke, and equally pressing all the Parts of Christianity, do not contradict by their Actions the Doctrines they profess with their Mouths. If Religion therefore were to be judg'd of from the Conduct and Discourses of its Professors, regard ought to be had rather to these Men than to others.

Secondly, I have shew'd elsewhere that since Men do not always act according to their Knowledg, but most frequently follow the Movements of their Passions, their Sentiments must not be always concluded from their Carriage. This being so, it may probably happen that certain Zealots might act very disagreeably to their Profession, which is an Argument that we ought not to judg. of their Perswasion from their Manners. We must confess however, that if in those Zealots there appears a continual Series of Actions contrary to the clearest Commands of the Gospel, or inveterate Habits of walking contrary to what must be known to be an essential part of Christianity, then we have great occasion to suspect them of Hypocrisy, and a Design of covering their Infidelity with a shew of Zeal. For it is not possible but that a strong and sincere Belief

Belief should at length eradicate out of the Heart all Habits which are directly contrary to it. But the most ingenuous Men may act sometimes against their Perswasion by Surprize, or the sudden Motions of a violent Passion.

Thirdly, As it would be Injustice to judg of the Goodness of the Laws of any Government from the way how they are observ'd, so it would be very ill reasoning to condemn the Christian Religion, because such as profess it obey it not. There may be most excellent Laws, and acknowledg'd too for such, yet not always strictly observ'd, by reason of the Interests and Passions of those who break 'em, as it may be remark'd in all Kingdoms of the World. 'Tis just so with the Christian Religion. What causes this Contradiction between the Sentiments and Carriage of Men, besides the Reasons already alledg'd, is perhaps because they know not how to apply the general Laws to the particular Cases which happen every day, and that they mistake the most prohibited Actions for Exceptions to the Rules. A famous Philosopher said, *that most of Mens Errors proceeded from their not knowing how to apply general to particular Ideas.* If we consider it nearly, we shall find that the same thing occasions at least in part the violation of many Laws, which are all the while thought just and well-grounded.

Arrian upon
Epictetus, l. 3.
c. 26.

Zeal

Zeal accompany'd with very great Ignorance, and the greater as the Ignorance is grosser, furnishes the Incredulous likewise with another Pretence of looking upon Religion as a blind Perswasion merely built upon the Credulity of the People. And indeed we see that in all Religions such as have least examin'd things, and that are the less discerning, appear frequently the hottest in defence of the Party with which they are engag'd. The furious Zeal of the Jews and Mahumetans, as well as that of the Pagan Populace, is so well known, that I need bring no Examples of it. In those Sects also into which Christianity is at present divided, the Heat wherewith the ignorant Multitude defend their Sentiments, and endeavour to propagate them, is but too common. This blind Zeal has so often broke out, and has made use of such ill Methods to advance each Party, that there is no Sect but has some reason to be asham'd of it.

But if this false Zeal may be consider'd as a Consequence of the Principles of the Heathens, the Mahumetans, the Jews, and some of the Christians; it is certain that true Christianity gives it no Approbation: so that if the Falsity of these Religions or Sects may be hence concluded, yet it follows not that we can reason against Christianity in the same manner. I have already shewn in the precedent Chapter that

that it requires no such thing as a blind Obedience from such as embrace it, and that it expressely condemns the furious Zeal which flows from this Spring. One of Christ's Apostles acknowledging that the Jews had a Zeal for God, adds, that it was without Knowledg, and blames it exceedingly. Another says to those to whom he writes; *If you have bitter Zeal and Strife in your Hearts, glory not, and lie not against the Truth: This Wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish: for where this Zeal and Strife is, there is Confusion and every evil Work.*

Rom. 10.2

Gal 1.14.

Jam. 3.14.

This blind Zeal then is not an Effect of the Christian Religion, and cannot be reasonably attributed to it; it is a Consequence of the Temper and Education of the ignorant Populace, who instead of defending the Truth by its proper Light, and the Vertues it does produce in their Hearts who duly receive it, defend it with the same Arms they would Error, that is, with Passion and Fury. This sort of People cannot, without extreme Injustice, be look'd upon as Models whereby to judg of the Spirit and Effects of Christianity, since it clearly condemns their Conduct. We must on the contrary cast our Eye upon the understanding Persons who make use of none but good Reasons in its Defence; and that, to procure themselves Love and Respect, practise only those calm and

peace.

peaceable Vertues they learn from Truth. This is the Character which the Founders of Christianity bestow upon them who ought to be consider'd as the true Christians. *The Wisdom that is from above, says the same Apostle, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality, and without Hypocrisy.*

C H A P. III.

That Unbelievers are in the wrong for rejecting the Christian Religion, because Interest seems to be the Cause of most Peoples Devotion.

SINCE Christianity has flourish'd in the World, it has frequently prov'd an advantageous thing to shew great Zeal for the Doctrines of it. Altho this makes no Change in the thing it self, (Truth not depending upon the Interest one has or has not to defend it) yet the Incredulous are sure to take an occasion from hence of doubting the Truth of the Christian Religion. There are Endeavours made sometimes to gain them over, by representing to them the Consent of the Clergy in so many Places and Ages: but they instantly reply, that 'tis no wonder

der if those Men did make a Profession of Christianity, since they would be great getters by it in so doing, but must lose infinitely if they did not.

And indeed we must confess, that no cogent Conclusion can be drawn from the Example of all such as have defended, or that now defend the Christian Religion against Infidels. But their Reasoning is still less solid, as I shall shew after putting it in a greater Light. It is not well done to give those Occasions of saying, that the Defenders of the Christian Religion diminish the Force of their Objections; and those who by their ill Carriage put before them this Stone of Offence and Stumbling, deserve to be reproached for it, not to speak of revenging in this place the Wrong they do to Christianity. Moreover, I have from the very beginning of this Work propos'd to my self not only to deal with such as entirely reject it, but with those also who seem to embrace it only by halves.

Let us imagine then a cheating Priest, (People but too much known in all *Christianity*) who pretends to some Benefice, if he has none already, or aspires to a greater Dignity than what he possesses. He appears humble, gentle, moderate, and kind. He speaks of nothing but Disinterestedness, and the Vanity of all the Enjoyments of this Life. If he has a Tal-
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lent for the Pulpit, he there principally shews his Zeal against the corrupt Manners of the Times. Nay, he's in a Fury against scandalous Clergy-men, and the Abuses committed in Ecclesiastical Matters, so long complain'd of, and not yet reform'd. In a word, he uses all the Discourses that should be made in that Place, in order to pass for an honest Man, and to make the World believe, that had his Incomes been greater, he would put 'em to much better Uses than most Ecclesiasticks do.

After acting his Part for some Years, at last he obtains his end, that is, a Dignity and Income that render him considerable in the World and in the Church. But then it may be said of him, *Quantum mutatus ab illo?* for indeed he's no longer to be known. He's forthwith haughty, hard-hearted, untractable, and passionate towards all such as he thinks his Inferiours. Those who were his Friends before, and upon whose Friendship too he valu'd himself, ought to be very well satisfy'd with him, if he now vouchsafes them a Look. The Obligations they laid upon him, while he continu'd a private Person, and when they expected no Returns from him, are quite lost. He thinks they were all due to his Merit, and that more were owing him; but as for himself, he owes nothing to any body, and does 'em too

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much Honour, when he coldly receives the Incense they are base enough to offer him. If he prefers any Man, he must be some Blockhead or Flatterer, People that have no Idea almost of their Duty, and that are ready to admire any thing, the Bad as well as the Good, so be you make 'em live at their Ease.

This Man so disinterested heretofore, becomes oftentimes insatiable, and the Revenues of the best Benefices are not sufficient to satisfy his Avarice. He procures therefore as many as he can, and has never too many. If he be naturally covetous, all that he preach'd before of Liberality is quite vanish'd, all the Invectives he made against Avarice are laid in perpetual Oblivion. He does Good to no body, and thinks of nothing but laying up Treasure. If on the contrary he be a voluptuous or stately Person, he consumes his great Incomes in keeping a magnificent Table, in having a stately Train, and living as the proudest Men, or the most addicted to their Pleasure in the World. The sordid Avarice of the one is a Frugality becoming a good Clergyman, and the excessive Luxury of the other is but an Expende absolutely necessary to keep up his Rank in the World, and to beget Respect in the Laity. Far from making the least Reformation in the Clergy that depend upon them, they let them loose

loose to all the ill Customs and Manners to which they are subject, on condition they be submissive to them, and meddle not with their particular Method of living.

When Unbelievers consider such a Conduct, they cannot help being perswaded that these Prelates, even before they get those Dignities which they so scandalously abuse, did not believe a word of the Matter. They imagine that they were not devoted to the Church to edify it, and to lead Christians to a vertuous Life by their Discourses and their Example, but out of Ambition or Avarice; and that they made use of the Cloak of Religion to come at their ends. They likewise draw hence a further Consequence, which is, that the Christian Religion is not true in it self, since Men of the first Order, and that make a Profession of defending it, believe it not, whatever they say by reason of those great Advantages they get by it.

It must be confess'd, that the Clergy who live after this manner, cannot reclaim Unbelievers, their Actions being directly contrary to their Discourses. They may long enough say the finest things in the World, and use the most solid Reasons; yet the Prejudice which Unbelievers imbibe from their Morals is so violent, that it carries it over all that can be said or imagin'd.

'Tis still much worse when Clergy-men, whose Morals are not better, and who were preferr'd by ill Arts, without being capable of discharging their Office, take upon them to censure unbelieving Lay-men. All that they can say serves for nothing else but to recal into the Minds of these Lay-men their Unworthiness, or the Artifices they made use of to get Preferment; nay, and what they say upon such Occasions does pass for a Continuation of their unlawful Ways. 'Tis believ'd they persist in acting a part, and all the Marks they give of their Zeal procures them nothing else but the Reputation of being the best Comedians. Mens Eyes are fix'd upon their evil Actions, and their Incapacity. They think always upon their Solicitations, and the shameful Practices they made use of to come at the Dignity which they enjoy. 'Tis remember'd that they made assiduous Court to such as could serve 'em, without being at the least Pains, in the mean while, of acquiring the necessary Talents and Knowledg for discharging this Employment they so much intrigu'd for. The Flatteries they so liberally bestow'd upon the Great, to whom they were ready to sacrifice all in order to be preferr'd, are not forgotten; and there is reason to believe they have not chang'd their Thoughts, when they are seen every day as servile towards such as
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are above them, as they are haughty towards their Inferiours.

If *Damasus* Bishop of *Rome* had endeavour'd to convert *Ammianus Marcellinus*, he had no sooner begun to speak, but this Pagan Historian would remember the way how *Damasus* was elevated to the Episcopal Dignity: *Damasus* and *Ursinus*, says he, burning with an excessive Desire of ob- Lib. 27. c. 3
taining the Episcopal See, oppos'd one another with so much Violence, that they and their Parties came to Blows, and to cut one another's Throats after they had sent for Arms. *Juventius* (Governour of the City) not being able to repress nor appease them, was constrained to force his way, retreating into the Suburbs. *Damasus* had the better, his Party having been very zealous in this Affair. 'Tis certain that in one day there were found in the Palace of *Sicinius*, where there is a Christian Church, an hundred and thirty seven dead Bodies; nor was it an easy Matter to pacify the People, who for a long time had been as it were in a Fury. For my part, when I consider the Splendor of the City of *Rome*, I must confess that such as aim at those things ought to oppose one another with all their Might to obtain their Desires: for after they enjoy it, they live at their Ease, they enrich themselves with the Offerings or Gifts of Women, they ride in their Chariots, they are well clad, and make Banquets so sumptuous that they exceed the Tables of Kings.

This is what *Marcellinus* writes of *Damasus*, and which, no doubt on't, could not dispose him to hear this Bishop. The good Order and Policy that at this time is almost every where establish'd, does hinder indeed the committing of such Irregularities ; but the secret and publick Brigues, the Solicitations for Men neither of Merit or Capacity, are not less frequent now than formerly. We see as many Persons who have nothing to recommend them to Preferment, but their Diligence in making their Court to such as could assist them ; Persons who have no other Talents for discharging the Employment they seek, but that of living easily and idly, join'd to an extreme Desire of obtaining it. Therefore we should not wonder if Clergy-men thus preferr'd encrease instead of diminishing the Number of the Incredulous.

Another thing which contributes much to keep up Infidelity among Christians, is, not only that such as profess the study of Religion, and of teaching it to others, are slight Observers of it themselves ; but also that they have often but a very confus'd Idea of it, and even in things of the greatest Consequence. I will give an Example of it, whereby it appears that Churchmen do violate almost every where one of the clearest Precepts of the Gospel, as much out of Ignorance, I believe, as Passion.

There

There is nothing so strongly recommended in the New Testament as the Love of our Neighbour; and this Love consists not only in helping, and being compassionate to him, in the things of this Life, but also in behaving our selves charitably towards him, if he be in any erroneous Opinion as to Religion, especially when it has little or no Influence upon his Manners. This charitable Carriage is one of the principal Branches, so to speak, of that general Love of our Neighbour, whom the Gospel commands us to love as our selves; and it is by so much the more considerable as it has been of perpetual Use since Christianity came into the World; and that it shall be perhaps till God thinks fit to call all Mankind to render an Account of their Actions. Christians have been divided almost from the very Beginning into divers Opinions; they are so still, and so they will continue, it may be, for ever; so that Charity towards such as are in Error, or are look'd upon so to be, has been always of great Use, and will be so, for ought we know, to the end of the World. Nevertheless it may be said, that no part of Christian Theology has been so long neglected as this has been. 'Tis but in the last Age, and especially in the present, that any Reflection has been made upon it. Nor have there been but a very few

Persons that made it their Business, and dar'd to affirm that it was one of the principal Points of the Morals of Christ, in the state of Ignorance wherein we live here below. Most of the Teachers of Religion treat with Vigour and Cruelty those they look upon as erring in their Opinions, let their Morals be never so good, tho they commonly pardon in others crying Vices. I will not as much as speak of the *Inquisition*, whose cruel Maxims are abhorr'd by a considerable Part of Christians, but of the Management observ'd in many Countries where it is not establish'd. Nor will I treat expressly here of this Question, which would require a Volume as great, at least, as this; I shall only touch as much of it as makes for my Purpose, without making any Digressions.

How is a Clergy-man treated in many Places if he forsakes the common Opinions never so little? If he has a Benefice, he is in great danger of losing it, or at least expos'd to the cruel Slanders of such as would fain get his Place, and who are always a good Number, altho he punctually discharges all his Duties, and that his Morals be irreproachable. But if he be not yet preferr'd, an Opinion contrary to the receiv'd Doctrines, be it of never so little Consequence, is sufficient to exclude him for ever from all sorts of Ecclesiastical

flastical Preferments. And so zealous are some about the Conformity of Opinions, that the least Suspicion is enough to do a vast Prejudice to any it falls upon. Nevertheless a great Number of Clergy-men are so uncharitable as to raise many Suspicions against such as they do not love. There's not a Consequence so odious but they boldly draw it from their Sentiments, and accuse them thereof to those where-upon they depend; and whom they often find so credulous about the ill that is said of their Neighbour, or so little inclin'd to believe the Good, that those Clergy-men in many Conversations ruin for ever some innocent Persons in the Opinion of such as listen to their Calumnies.

On the contrary, if a Clergy-man who is already in possession of a Benefice, or that aims at one, be a Blockhead, idle, spending his time in eating and drinking, smoking, slandering, or doing some very scandalous thing, provided he be Orthodox, as they speak, he quietly enjoys what he has got, or is in a condition of being preferr'd in the Church without changing his Manners. Good Men censure in vain his manner of Living, without objecting any thing to him except what is publick; but they are not hearkned to, and towards him alone are practis'd the Duties of that Charity which *thinketh no Evil, beareth all* 1 Cor. 3. things 5. 7.

things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

The Unbelievers who have their Eyes principally fix'd upon the Carriage of the Clergy, conclude from hence two things; the one, that good Morals, that is, the principal Duties of Christianity are the Qualities they have least regard to; and the other, that the Body of Ecclesiasticks is only a mere Faction, where the Discovery of Truth is not intended, but to support by all ways what can procure or preserve their temporal Interests. The Incredible add further, that the Candidates or Pretenders to the Benefices look upon them as a Prey whereupon they may seize whenever they are vacant; or which they may forcibly snatch from such as possess 'em by whatever Means they can. They conclude that the end of all this Zeal affected for the Doctrines is no other thing but a good Income, and that they would not vouchsafe even to inform themselves about those Doctrines, if this Income were not settled only upon such as should.

'Tis in vain for the Clergy to say the contrary to Unbelievers; the constant Practice of so many Ages and Nations makes more Impression upon them than all the Discourse that can be made to them. From hence it is that they come to consider Christianity it self as they do the falsest Religions, and so die in an incurable

ble Infidelity; by their own Fault, it's true; but also by a specious occasion of judging wrong, which several Clergy-men give 'em.

They are by so much the more confirm'd in their Infidelity, as they see the Zeal for Temporals very different from that concerning Spirituals. And this they easily discover by the Distinction that is made of those who defend and are passionate for the temporal Interests of their Party; and of them, who, defending Christianity by the strongest Reasons imaginable, and after the best Method of clearing Peoples Understanding, deny not but that there are some Disorders in the Discipline of the Church which need Reformation. Those last who ought to be esteem'd and advanc'd by such whose Profession obliges to favour them, are put back for ever, and look'd upon as very dangerous Persons, whilst the first are in favour all the while, and are sure to obtain what they desire.

The Incredulous judg by this Conduct that it is not Christianity in general they mind, whatever they say, but the temporal Interests of the Party; since those who consecrate themselves for the Defence and Propagation of the first are disgrac'd, and no Reward is thought too great for others.

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These are the principal Prejudices which Ecclesiasticks by their Fault occasion Unbelievers to entertain. I could add several things much more home upon them, if I would speak of all the Abuses committed in the Places where Christianity is most corrupted; but if what I have mention'd does an extraordinary Injury to Religion, what may we not say of the rest? And besides, the Answer I design to make to these Prejudices, may solve the Difficulties which might proceed from greater Disorders than those whereof I have spoken.

To shew that the Occasions of Scandal and Stumbling which are given to the Incredulous, and of which we have been now speaking, ought not to injure Christianity in general, and that consequently they should not hinder any from acknowledging its Truth; it must be consider'd in it self, and in its first Original. If there have been Additions made to it, and if it has been since corrupted, that is no Defect in Christianity, but their Fault who made these Additions or Alterations.

Those who have read the Gospel, and the other Writings of the Apostles, cannot say that the first Founders of the Christian Religion have engag'd such as would preach it to discharge this Duty from any Consideration of Interest. Jesus Christ promises nothing but Persecutions and Mi-
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series in this World to the first Ministers of the Gospel: *I send you forth, says he, Mat. 10. 16 as Sheep among Wolves. They will bring you into their Synagogues, and scourge you. You shall be brought for my sake before Governours and Kings. The Brother shall deliver the Brother to Death, and the Father the Child; and the Children shall rise up against their Parents, and cause them to be put to Death; and you shall be hated of all Men for my Name's sake.* He also says unto one of his Apostles, whom he call'd after an extraordinary manner; *I will shew him how great things Acts 9. 16. he must suffer for my Name's sake.*

The Event did quickly convince the Apostles that these Predictions of Jesus Christ were not vain. The Jews and the Heathens, for the most part, gave them a very ill Reception; and many of Christ's first Disciples suffer'd Death for discharging the Function wherewith their Master honour'd them. It cannot be said therefore that it was Interest which engag'd them in it, or that confirm'd them in their first Undertaking. Had Jesus Christ made a considerable Provision for such as would preach his Gospel (as he might, and his Doctrine be never the falser) it must be confess'd that it would have been somewhat difficult to shew Unbelievers that the Apostles did not act at all by any Interest, and we should want a most considerable Proof of their Sincerity, and consequent-
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ly of the Truth of those Matters of Fact which they preach'd. Herein we have Matter of prailing Divine Providence that has taken such Care about the first establishing of the Gospel, as to prevent those disadvantageous Suspicions which People might nourish concerning any Establishment like the present State of Christianity. If Jesus Christ himself had enjoy'd all the Conveniences of Life ; as if he had been exalted, for example, upon the temporal Throne of the Family of *David*, from whom he was descended ; then his Morals, as fine as they are, and even the Sanctity of his Life had never made any Impressions upon Mens Minds ; because, when any great temporal Advantage is join'd to Vertue, or made the Reward of it, we easily suspect then that such as adhere to it are more influenc'd by this Advantage than by Vertue it self.

Since that time the Christian Religion being well establish'd, the Piety of its Professors has not only provided for the Subsistence of those who succeeded in the Apostolick Functions ; but also, considering all Places, for their Conveniences, and a considerable Expence in which they were engag'd. As soon as Persons of Quality became Christians, and that the Emperors themselves embrac'd it, it was thought fit that the principal Guides of the Church should live in some Splendor, without
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which they must become contemptible, and unable not only to keep up their Respect with the People, but likewise with Kings, and Men of the first Order. To consider Mankind such as it is now, and ever will be, and not such as it ought to be, it is evident that this Settlement was necessary after Christianity became the governing Religion.

Upon this it happen'd that many of those who aim'd at Ecclesiastical Dignities did look upon them as mere temporal Settlements, whereby they might live great. But the Worldliness of those People cannot, without Injustice, be attributed to the Christian Religion, nor to the Founders of it, as I have shewn. Nor can they be blam'd neither, who have augmented the Dignity and Revenues of Church-men, because they did it with a good Design, and that it is possible enough for such as enjoy those Dignities and Revenues, to make a better Use of them than most do. If after making as modest Expences as can be for the external Part, they spend the rest of their Revenues to some good Purposes; where is the harm of this? Is there any Law in being that prohibits it? No surely; neither is there any thing that hinders them from being obliging, humble, and moderate, or from remembering their former Condition before they came to these Dignities. Who would not heap
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Commendations upon them, if they did so manage themselves that it might appear as much as possible that it was not to satisfy their Avarice, or any other Passion, they endeavour'd to obtain the Dignities aforesaid ; but to edify the Church more, and to lead the People to Piety and Charity by their Example, which is of much greater Efficacy than their Discourses? Have there not been in divers Places and Times some Clergy-men that behav'd themselves after this manner, and who drew upon themselves the Respect and Admiration of the whole World. Such were the Bishops whereof *Ammianus Marcellinus* speaks immediately after giving that Description of those Bishops of *Rome* which I mention'd before. His Testimony is of so much greater Weight as he was a Heathen, and shews every where clear Tokens of his Sincerity. *They might, says he, be really happy, if despising the Grandeur of the City of Rome, wherein they conceal'd their Vices, they had imitated the way of Living of some Prelates in the Provinces whom the Frugality of their Tables, the Simplicity of their Habit, and their Eyes always fix'd upon the Ground, did render acceptable to God, and to his true Worshipers, as vertuous and modest Persons.* Therefore it is unjustly done of Unbelievers to attribute to the old or modern Christianity the Faults of those who abuse the Ecclesiastical Dignities ; and to

conclude from hence the Falsity of the Christian Religion is the worst Reasoning that can be.

The same thing may be answer'd to the Objections of Unbelievers drawn from the scandalous manner after which several Clergy-men have been preferr'd, and spend the Revenues destin'd by their Founders for Men fit to edify the Church. If they make a mere Trade of these Employments, and look upon their Revenues as Pensions granted to their Importunities or Flatteries, is this either the Fault of the Religion it self, or of the Founders of those Benefices? Do we not see many vertuous Clergy-men who have been advanc'd only by their Merit, and that make an excellent Use of their Dignities and Revenues?

'True it is indeed, that those who abuse them are not proper Persons to cure the Incredulous of their Prejudices, and that, far from edifying such as know them, they cannot fail almost, considering Mens Dispositions, of corrupting or scandalizing them. 'Tis the Duty therefore of all good Men to provide a Remedy against this Disgrace of the Christian Religion, and to stop the Mouths of Unbelievers.

If the Author of the Christian Religion, or those who first spread it throughout all the World, had order'd their Disciples to suffer no Diversity of Opinions, not

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even in things that are not essential, and to persecute those who would not in every thing follow the Sentiments of the greatest Number; the Libertines might then questionless justly attribute to them all the sad Consequences that proceed from that intolerating Principle whereof some Divines make Profession. But 'tis just the contrary; the Founders of the Christian Religion recommend nothing so much as Moderation and Charity in such Dissensions.

The Jews and the Heathens that were converted to Christianity agreed not well with one another in the Days of the Apostles. The Jews, among other things, would have the Gentiles observe the Distinction of Meats which the Levitical Law introduc'd, and condemn'd all those who refus'd to do it. The Gentiles, who knew that God requir'd this Observation only from the Jews, and that too but whilst they had a separate Government to themselves, deny'd Submission to this Yoke, and laugh'd at the Superstition of the Jews. Now what did the Apostles in this Affair? What Counsel does *St. Paul* give his Disciples? Do they say that the one must follow the Practice and Opinions of the other in all things, under pain of Excommunication? Do they order the Christian Church to persecute, as soon as she could be able, all those whose Sentiments

ments should in any thing differ from the Majority? Nothing less than all this: For the Apostles divide the Controversy, as it were; and will have both the Parties to have a Condescension for one another. They do not enjoin the Jews to eat without scruple the Flesh of those Creatures prohibited in their Law; nor do they on the other hand subject the Gentiles to the Superstition of the Jews. They only command them, *to abstain from Meats offer'd to Idols, and from Blood, and from things* Acts 15. 29. *strangl'd*; because the Jews were exceedingly offended to see those who believ'd in Jesus Christ, and kept Company with the Apostles, eat such things, whereof they thought the Use forbidden all Mankind. They declare, *that it seem'd good to the Holy Ghost and to them, to lay upon them no greater Burden than those necessary things.* St. Paul, after telling the Corinthians, *that no Man can lay any other Foundation than what is already laid, which is Jesus Christ,* adds, *That if any Man builds upon* 1 Cor. 3. *this Foundation Gold, Silver, precious Stones,* 11, &c. *(that is, true Doctrines) Wood, Hay, Stubble, (that is to say false Doctrines, tho not destroying the Foundation) the Fire shall try every Man's Work; and that if any Man's Work abide, he shall receive a Reward; but that if any Man's Work shall be burnt, he shall indeed suffer Loss, but yet shall be sav'd so as by Fire.* In his Epistle to the Romans,

Rom. 14.
1, &c.

where he speaks distinctly of that Controversy decided by the Apostles, hear what Advice he gives them ; *Him that is weak in the Faith receive, but not to doubtful Disputations : for one believeth that he may eat all things, another who is weak eateth Herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another Man's Servant ? To his own Master he standeth or falleth ; yea he shall be bolden up ; for God is able to make him stand ; that is, to keep him from being led by Weakness into fundamental Errors.* St. Paul adds several things upon the same Subject, which now I shall not relate ; but all that he says does clearly suppose that we must bear with one another in such things as destroy not the Foundation, that is, which do not hinder us from putting our Trust in Jesus Christ, or keeping his Commandments.

Now if after all this, other Maxims are observ'd in our time, they cannot be attributed to the Apostles, nor consequently be look'd upon as Doctrines of the Christian Religion. Whatever Imputations they may be liable to who violate this Branch of Charity relating to the Erroneous, (for they give too great Occasions of Reflection) yet these disadvantageous Characters cannot stain the Christian Religion.

It is no way needful for me to prove, that according to the Notions of the Gospel,

spel, the Care of the spiritual Part is incomparably above that of the temporal. The whole System of the Christian Religion speaks no other Language; and therefore they deserve much more Esteem who endeavour to extirpate Infidelity and Vices, than they who defend the temporal Interests of Christianity; for the first are infinitely more useful to the Church than the latter. Wherefore if some convert the Interest of Religion to that of a Party, they must be blam'd, and not the Religion which wholly condemns this Practice.

C H A P. IV.

That the Divisions reigning among Christians should not hinder any from believing that the Christian Religion is true.

WE learn from Ecclesiastical History, that from the very Decease of the Apostles, nay and during their Lives too, the Christians begun to be divided into Parties. But it was principally in the second Age that a world of Sects grew up which tore Christianity into pieces after a most scandalous manner; and since that time one Sect has constantly succeeded another, so that it may be said

the Christian Church was never without Divisions. What is yet worse is, that most of those Sects mutually condemn one another. Each of them pretends that there is no Salvation for such as embrace not the Doctrines they teach. I need not enter upon Particulars, or bring distinct Proofs of these Divisions and Anathemas; for they are Matters of Fact but too well known to all the World.

From hence Unbelievers take an occasion of saying that the Christian Religion is like all others, and that if it had come from Heaven, as 'tis said to do, Christians would be better agreed than they are found to be. The same God, say they, who gave it to Men, would take care to prevent those Divisions that extremely lessen the Effects of it. On the contrary, it seems to be the Apple of Discord, which no sooner appear'd in the World, but it caus'd numberless Divisions. They add, that this keeps Infidels and such as have been educated in other Religions from embracing it: for not knowing which of those Sects it is that teaches the true Christianity, and being not in a condition to examine them all, they are at a loss how to determine the Affair. They ask further of such as write for the Truth of Christianity, as I do now, which Christian Religion it is we defend; whether it be that which the Roman Church professes,
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or that of any of the other Sects that make a separate Body? There is not, say they, any Christianity in general, and therefore you must determine for some of the Parties; which is it then you have undertaken to defend?

There are another sort of People whose Conduct is not more prudent than that of the Incredulous, and who after another manner abuse the Divisions which reign among Christians. They say, that not being capable to examine all these different Sentiments, they find no Method more sure than implicitly to embrace the Religion of the Country wherein they live, since they must needs be of some Party. The Incredulous reject all the different Opinions of Christians, as equally ungrounded by reason of their Divisions; and such as say that without any Examination they believe the Religion of their Country, know not well themselves what they profess to believe, and are exposed to almost as much Danger of mistaking as the Incredulous: for, in short, to reject all Opinions, and to embrace, not knowing why, the first Opinion that offers it self, is much the same thing. At bottom the latter are not a greater Honour to Christianity than the first, seeing they both of them suppose it destitute of any Marks to distinguish it from Error or Imposture; therefore I thought it necessary

to examine in this Chapter the Conduct of the one and the other.

To begin with the Incredulous, and to answer their Objections in the same Order that I alledg'd them, I absolutely deny that it follows from the Divisions of Christians, that the Christian Religion is not divinely reveal'd. If the Christians could produce a Promise from the Founder of their Religion, assuring them that they should never be divided, then the Reasoning of the Incredulous might pretend to some Force; they could say that this Promise not being perform'd, it was a sign it did not proceed from God. But Matters are quite contrary; Jesus Christ and his Disciples considering the Dispositions of Men, and foreseeing likewise future Events, have clearly prophesied of the Divisions that should spring up among Christians. *Suppose you, says Jesus Christ, that I am come to give Peace on Earth? I tell you, nay; but rather Division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one House divided, three against two, and two against three, &c. There must be Heresies among you, says St. Paul, that they which are approv'd may be also made manifest among you.* Here are exprefs Words signifying that Jesus Christ and his Apostles were not ignorant of the Divisions, which the Christian Religion ill understood, or rather the Passions of Men would occasion among Christians.

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Luke 12.
51.

1 Cor. 11.
19.

But some may say, that it is a thing unworthy of a Religion reveal'd from Heaven to cause so many Divisions, especially having such fatal Effects. I grant this, if it be supposed that this Religion does of itself inspire the Spirit of Division and Disorder; but if it be only the innocent occasion of them, there can be no ill Consequence drawn from hence against it. Now it cannot be doubted, but that Christianity is directly opposite to the Divisions of Christians, since Jesus Christ presses no Commandment so strongly as that of our loving one another, and consequently of living peaceably one towards another. Every one knows this. Christ however knew so perfectly the Heart of Man, that he saw very well *the new Command of loving one another*, which he left his Disciples, should not be well obey'd; and that his Doctrine, as peaceable as it was, would frequently serve for a Pretence to the Passions of Men in occasioning infinite Broils; so that if his Design were to be explain'd by the Event, it might be certainly said he came to bring Divisions on the Earth. This is the Sense of those Words I cited a little above.

John 13.
33, 34.
& 15. 12,
17, &c.

But what, some will say? Does it not seem a thing becoming God, for the Honour of Religion and for the Good of Men, to prevent its producing any Disorders, not even by Accident? No surely, God ought

* Part I.
Ch. 3.

ought not to intervene by the extraordinary Effects of his Power to keep the Peace among Christians. The Reason of this is, that his Design, as it appears both by Revelation and the thing it self, was by no means to bring Men, at least ordinarily, to his Obedience by Miracles of this nature; but only by Laws to which he fix'd Rewards and Punishments, as I have already said in * another Place. This is what St. Paul hinted to in one word in that Passage I cited before, when he says, *That there must be Heresies, that they which are approved may be also made manifest.* This plainly signifies that if God by extraordinary means would hinder all Divisions about his Doctrine among Christians, it should be no longer a Vertue to remain stedfast on the good side, or to quit the bad in order to join it. Those who love the Truth, and keep to it out of Choice and Knowledg, would be confounded with those who should embrace it without knowing why, and who are as ready to embrace an Error, were they taught it. The constant Profession of the Truth could not expect any Reward, since it would not be in any ones Power to forsake it. In a word, it would be superfluous to propose any Laws at all to Men, since it could not be in their Power to violate them; for God, according to our Adversaries Supposition, would prevent this by his Omnipotency.

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But it will be said perhaps that a wise Legislator who foresees that his Laws may be ill understood, or cause Division should he express them obscurely, would take care to use very clear Expressions; and that God, who foresees all things, ought by Consequence to express his Will in so clear a manner as to prevent all the Disputes which we see now among Christians. To this I answer, that God has express'd himself plainly enough in the Writings of the Apostles, especially about what is necessary to be believ'd, hop'd, and done, to obtain Salvation according to the Laws of the Gospel; and that there would be no Disputes about Necessaries if Men did content themselves with the Scripture-Notions. What made Divisions spring among Christians are the Additions and ill-drawn Consequences, and not the Text of the New Testament. Such as look in it only for the Truth, they easily find this, and are never deceiv'd about any thing essential; but those who would find therein what vain Subtlety and humane Interests or Passions have added to it, are apt, I confess, to be deceived every moment. In a word, to all sincere Persons who love the Truth preferably to every other thing, the Gospel is as clear as the Sun, and cannot occasion any considerable Dispute: But to Men govern'd by their Passions, and conceited of their Prejudices, the most
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evident things in the World are obscure. There is no Law so clear, but a Wrangler may raise a thousand Difficulties about it; and if a Legislator should not pass for a wise Man, except he expressly prevented all possible Difficulties, and mark'd all the Cases wherein ill-disposed Persons would abuse his Laws, there had never been any Legislator to whom any Wisdom could be attributed. None ever undertook to perform such a thing, because then they would be oblig'd to write an infinite Number of Volumes, to which something new must be added every Moment, since there might happen infinite Cases every day. Therefore if God had design'd to prevent all those Controversies already mov'd, or that shall hereafter arise about the Sense of Revelation, and rejected by Name all possible Errors, he must have made so great a Number of Volumes, that, to use St. John's Expression, *the World could not contain them*, and their Multitude would render them useless.

For proof that the clearest Laws, and the most proper to prevent all sorts of Disorders, become obscure to such as are not dispos'd to observe them; we need only call to mind what is already said of the Charity to be us'd towards those who are in an Error about any Article of Religion. It was not possible to speak more clearly or effectually upon this Head than
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the Apostles have done : and nevertheless the most part of Christians practise at this time what they ought to have done if they had said just the contrary. Thus they dispute about the Sense of the Revelation, rather because they are blinded by Prejudices, and willing to dispute, than because it is in it self obscure with regard to necessary Doctrines ; and God was not oblig'd by any means to condemn expressly all possible Errors to prevent Disputes, as I have now shewn.

The Divisions that are among Christians, should not hinder the Incredulous or Infidels from giving them the hearing when they exhort them to embrace the Christian Religion. The Reason of this is, that all Christians, notwithstanding their Divisions, are agreed about certain Articles, by the Examination whereof Unbelievers must necessarily begin ; and not by those particular Controversies which divide Christians. All Christians are agreed about the Creation of the World, about Revelation in general, the moral Precepts of the Gospel, with the Rewards and Punishments annex'd to them. They agree likewise about the History of the Gospel, the Divine Mission of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, the Resurrection, and last Judgment. These are the things they undertake to prove first, when they deal with Infidels or Unbelievers ;

vers; and this is what with common Consent they call the Principles of Christianity, which they prove all with like Reasons.

'Tis just with Religion as with several other Sciences in which the Learned are not less divided. There are very great Disputes, for example, among the Physicians, about the Causes of Diseases, the Virtues of Remedies, and the way of applying them; but, maugre all their Contests, there are certain things wherein they all agree. In Anatomy, in the Description of the Symptoms of Diseases, in the Knowledg of Simples, and in Chymistry there are a thousand things whereof no body doubts, and which are the most important Parts of Physick, with which a Learner of this Science must first begin. And 'tis so, as I have already said, with the different Sects of Christianity. As the Diversity in the Opinions of Physicians keeps none that has a mind to it from examining the Principles of their Art; so the Difference of Sentiments in Religion cannot discourage the Lovers of Truth: and indeed, as we have shewn in the first Part, they are other sorts of Motives which take off the Incrédulous from examining it.

What I have call'd *the Principles of Christianity*, is the same thing with what we may name, *Christianity in general*. Altho
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there be no Christian Society that comprehends all its Belief within those Ideas only about which all Christians are agreed; yet this hinders not but that those Ideas may include the fundamental Doctrines of Christianity, and that we must be determin'd about these before we examine any particular Doctrine of those Societies which profess our Religion. This is also what I undertake to defend in this Work, and from the Truth or Falshood whereof depends all the rest. If it be acknowledg'd, for instance, that these general Doctrines are true, we must then examine in what Society they are most purely taught: but were they found to be false, then we needed not examine any particular Sect; seeing that all defending the same general Principles, if they were not true, then all the Sects would be all equally false.

It is manifest then that the Divisions of Christians ought not to be any Prejudice against Christianity in general, nor hinder the Incredulous from examining it. Nor is it less certain that they cannot take any Person off from this Examen, that has a mind to embrace any one Sect. The Divisions indeed render this Disquisition somewhat difficult, but by no means impossible. I shall be told, no doubt, that this is true with respect to Men of Letters or understanding Persons; but the Question is, what the ignorant Populace must do

do in these Divisions? As they are commonly judg'd incapable of this Disquisition; so the surest way for them, some think, is to engage with the first Party that offers it self.

To this I answer, first, That to pass for a good Christian one must know, at least, those general Principles we spoke of. If there be People so stupid as to comprehend nothing of 'em, tho otherwise Men of good Morals, we leave the Disposal of them to God; but, as I said in another Place, they differ very little from the Savages of *America* or *Africa*.

Secondly, If such as have Parts enough to comprehend the Principles of the Christian Religion, and Vertue enough to frame their Morals according to this Model, are not able however to take Cognizance of those Differences which divide Christians; it is not very difficult to determine what they must do both in Equity and Prudence. They ought not to judge of what they do not understand. They ought neither to approve or condemn any Party concerning the Doctrines in Dispute. He that requires more of them, makes them pass the Limits of their Understanding, and obliges them to form an unjust and hasty Judgment. While they find themselves incapable to receive true Information of the Reasons on all sides, or to distinguish certainly which is in the wrong,

wrong, they ought to suspend their Judgments about Controversies. 'Tis a Rule authoriz'd by common Sense not to judge of what we do not understand; nor can we believe, without renouncing common Sense, that God would have any body acquiesce without good Reasons for it. St. Paul tells us, that *whatever is not of Faith* Rom. 14. (or Perswasion) *is Sin*; that is, that before we resolve to act in point of Religion (for this is what he there treats of) we must be perswaded that we are in the right: but this we cannot be, unless we evidently know why.

It will be said perhaps that God may be pleas'd with this Cautiousness and Moderation, but that Men will not bear it, since they commonly oblige those that live in the same Society with them to declare for all their Doctrines. Notwithstanding whatever is requir'd of Men, it is certain that they keep to this Wariness whereof I spoke; because they are luckily incapable of understanding such Controversies as divide Christians; altho they easily comprehend the Ground of Christianity, which is suited to all sorts of Capacities that are not quite destitute of their reasoning Faculty about what makes no Impression upon the Senses. Those People giving little Attention to what they do not understand, apply themselves wholly to what they comprehend. Thus

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they leave their Controversies to Divines, whilst they mind only the Essentials of Christianity. Such as are not more knowing, and yet venture further in their Opinions, and act accordingly, do judg and act manifestly against common Prudence and natural Equity. To imagine that God would have any Regard to so unreasonable a Conduct, is to extinguish the most certain Light of Reason or Religion.

In the third place, If it be suppos'd that such as cannot enter into the Detail of Controversies have nevertheless a little more Knowledg than those I have describ'd, then they may easily determine themselves after this manner, without running any risk at all. By reading Confessions of Faith they may learn wherein all Parties in *Christendom* agree, and take that for the Foundation and Ground of Religion; because it is not likely that so many different Parties who dispute so eagerly against one another, should agree in acknowledging certain Heads as the true Doctrines of Christianity, if they were not such in effect. By the different Parties of *Christendom* I understand not all the Sects that ever have been, but such as subsist at this time. The greatest Part of the old Sects are unknown to us; and if we may judg of them by what we read in History, most of them did maintain such extravagant Positions, or led such shameful

ful Lives, that it was no difficult thing to discover their Errors. If to this they add the reading of the New Testament, they will be entirely confirm'd in this Point. But if after all this any would oblige them to approve or condemn beyond what they understand, or what they learnt in the New Testament, and from the unanimous Consent of all Christians, they may desire to be rightly inform'd concerning those things. And if such Informations be so obscure that they cannot understand them, after all possible Application on their part; or if they plainly perceive that they are repugnant to that general Idea of Christianity which they found before, then they cannot look upon them but as false or suspected, or at least as unnecessary. But if they be not permitted to judg according to their Knowledge, nor to search after Truth, they must retire into those Places where they may freely do it, rather than to live against the Light of their Consciences.

I shall not enlarge more upon this Subject; and 'tis an easy Task to infer from what I have here said the necessary Consequences to answer all Questions that may be made hereupon. It is sufficient for me rightly to conclude, that the Divisions of Christians cannot engage a reasonable Person either implicitly to embrace the first

Party that offers it self, or to reject all the Christian Religion.

C H A P. V.

That the Incredulous object in vain, that Christianity being so little known, and so ill observ'd, is not so useful to Mankind as a Religion reveal'd by God in favour of all Men ought to be.

IT is a Doctrine generally receiv'd among Christians, that the Christian Religion is not reveal'd for any one People, or any peculiar Places, but for all Nations, and the whole Earth. And this is certainly the Doctrine of Christ and his Apostles. Hereupon the Incredulous make two Objections: The first is, that there are a great many Nations to whom the Gospel has not been yet preach'd, and who live still in a profound Ignorance. The other is, that among Christians themselves every Party affirms that Christianity is not so well known as it should be among the rest. Thus most Men know nothing of it, and a great part of such as heard of it understand it so little, if you believe the rest, that it signifies nothing at all to them. The Incredulous are of opinion that Providence should have

have order'd this Matter better ; but we can easily answer these Difficulties.

Jesus Christ and his Apostles have indeed taught us that the Christian Religion was not as the Jewish, and that it should be preach'd to all Nations ; but they said no where that this should happen all of a sudden, or in a few Ages. They have not excluded any People from the Knowledge of the Gospel, or from the Worship which God requires of Men, as the Jewish Religion did, which was given only to the Jews, and could not be entirely observ'd by any that did not live in *Palestine*. But they did not say, that at a certain time the Gospel should be spread over all the Earth, strictly taken, that is, in both the Hemispheres ; and that all the People of the World would acknowledg the Creator of Heaven and Earth for their God, and Jesus Christ alone for their Saviour, their Priest, and their King. They cannot therefore be blam'd if the Gospel is not yet known to all Men. This Objection does no more concern them, than if they were charg'd with the Ignorance of such as liv'd before the Coming of Christ. For as God did not think fit to send Jesus Christ sooner, so he was not yet willing, it may be, that all People should know him. However there are no People to whom he has not been gracious enough to expect their thankful Returns, tho he has

been more kind to one than to another. There is no Injustice in this, provided he requires no more than he has given; I mean if he judges all Nations according to their Portions of Knowledg, as he infallibly will do.

It might be said perhaps, that if the Gospel be not yet made known to all the World, it is the Fault of Christians. Some of 'em think of quite another thing, besides imparting their Knowledg to those People who live yet in Ignorance. They are at immense Expences to satisfy their Desires, or to make War upon one another; but would not be at a very moderate one to declare the Gospel to such as are ignorant of it. The hope of Gain makes them run to the end of the World, and hazard all in order to be rich; but they will not put themselves to the least Inconvenience to carry the Gospel where it is not. Nevertheless God's Command of doing it to the Apostles extends to all Christians, as I could easily prove. Others who seem more sensible of this Command of Christ do send indeed a great number of Missionaries whithersoever they can. But without blaming their Intention, which is undoubtedly good consider'd in general, it may be justly said that a great Number of those Missionaries are not themselves Masters enough of Christianity to convert true Disciples for Jesus Christ

Christ among the Heathens. They frequently carry with them the Spirit of Lying, and never gain those People but by imposing upon them. Instead of the plain Principles of the Christian Religion, and the admirable Maxims of its Morals, they teach 'em a thousand useless, not to say false things, and an infinite Number of vain or frivolous Practices which have no relation with Charity at all. We ought not therefore to wonder if the Gospel has not any great Success, seeing those whom God has commanded to spread it, either wholly neglect this Precept, or not duly perform it. Men are to be blam'd then, and not God, who has given them excellent Laws, but not constrain'd them to Obedience.

But Unbelievers pretend that Providence should have look'd to this by extraordinary Means, and not vainly expect from Christians the execution of those Orders, which, according to us, were given so long a time since, tho not hitherto observ'd as they ought. To this I answer, besides what I have already said of God's Liberty to dispose of his Favours as he pleases, that the Conduct of Providence ought not to be judg'd of by what is past. The Time may come perhaps when Divine Worship shall be paid to none, except the Creator of the Universe, and no other Doctrine be acknowledg'd but that of Je-

us Christ. This time likewise may be infinitely longer than what is past since the Creation, and the Ages of Ignorance not go but for a very few Years in comparison of the times of Light; so that the Duration of God's Beneficence in this regard shall be infinitely more considerable, than were those Ages wherein he seems to some to have neglected the greatest part of Mankind.

✓ The Christian Religion does teach us, that one day the present State of Men upon this Earth shall be entirely chang'd, and that they must give an account of their Actions to be rewarded or punish'd accordingly; but we are not inform'd when this time shall be: and such as thought it should happen soon after the Coming of Christ, from some obscure Expression of him or his Apostles, were altogether mistaken, as we see now. *He before whom a thousand Years are but as one day, whose Anger endureth but for a Moment, but in whose Favour is Life,* may have Prospects infinitely more extended, and which require a great deal more time. We whose Lives are short, and who look upon the future as a thing not relating to us; we, I say, grow impatient, and the Ardor of our Desires makes us think the time yet longer than it is: but God who changes not, and that sees all Time as present, considers things after quite another manner than we do,

1 Pet. 3. 8.
Psal. 30. 5.

do, and looks upon all limited Durations as most short. We must not therefore judg of Providence by that small time which is past since the Creation, seeing in the Eternity that follows it, he may choose what Space he pleases to bestow liberal Favours upon all Nations.

This indeed is but a Conjecture, but it must be granted that it contains nothing, except what agrees very well with that great Idea which the Christian Religion as well as our own Reason gives us of the Goodness of God and his eternal Duration. Nothing demonstrative can be alledg'd against this Notion, and Unbelievers cannot suppose it to be false without they prove it so.

What has been said is sufficient to solve their second Objection, grounded upon that little Knowledg of true Christianity wherewith Christians reproach one another. 'Tis through the Fault of Men that this happens, and God does not ordinarily oppose it otherwise than by Laws accompanied with Rewards and Punishments. But some People there are who believe that God will one day reform Christianity after an extraordinary manner. This might well be; but suppose it should never happen, we must remember that there is no Sect of any Consideration so corrupted, but that the Essence of Christianity is preserv'd among 'em, altho the
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Additions made by several of them strangely disfigure it. Such as keep only to these essential Points, (which is all that may be easily understood) and who leave the rest to the Schools, have a just Idea enough of Religion, and cannot be said not to understand all that is necessary to Salvation. The Reproaches of Controvertists fall rather upon the Preachers than upon those upright and sincere Persons, who take of Religion as much as they understand, and live conformably to their Notions.

Unbelievers make another Objection against Religion, which at first sight appears difficult to answer; and it is, that the most clear and essential Precepts of Christianity are very little observ'd among Christians: whence the Incredulous infer, that it has not a sufficient Influence upon Mens Lives for a Religion maintain'd to be reveal'd from God, and that consequently it is not originally Divine. This Consequence is very false, as I shall shew: But I think it material, before I do this, to enlarge a little upon the Disorders of Christianity; because in effect the best Answer we can make to Unbelievers, and the properest to get them over to us, is to acknowledg frankly that we are greatly to blame in not better observing the Commands of Christ, and to endeavour for the future to reform our Manners.

Where-

Whereas the Christian Religion obliges us to think frequently of God, to wean us from the Vanities of this Life, and to teach us our Duties contain'd in his Laws, that we may obey them, by reason of the great Rewards and terrible Punishments annex'd to them; the quite contrary is commonly practis'd among Christians. God is rarely thought of, and Christians are almost as much blinded and possess'd with Avarice, Ambition, or the Love of Pleasure, as those People to whom the Gospel is unknown, altho there be some Difference as to the manner of their giving themselves up to these Passions. There is a Diversity, I grant, in their Customs; but the three Passions I nam'd are the Soul of almost all Christians Actions, as well as of those of the Heathens. Men are as much intoxicated among us with the Vanities of this Life, as among them; and the Pride or Insolence of Riches are not much less in *Europe* than in the midst of *Asia*. Christians study the Art of satisfying their Passions, and apply themselves so wholly to it, as if God had promis'd eternal Happiness to them for so doing, and threatn'd those with Damnation that would spend their time in the study of his Will, or regulate their Manners according to his Laws.

'Tis true that they spend some time at Church, that they say some Prayers, and read

read some pious Books ; but is this time to be compar'd with that which is spent in things they may very well be without ? or, not to mention the time, will they say that they are more desirous to be instructed in their Duties, and to practise them, than to grow rich, or satisfy some other Passion ? Do they, for example, understand the *Morals* of Christ, as well as the cunning Part of Traffick, and speak of the former with as great a Pleasure as those who follow Trade speak of the latter ? Yet it should be otherwise, seeing Men shall not be sav'd, because they were industrious Merchants, but because they knew and practis'd Christianity well. The same may be said of some other Professions, wherein Christians spend all their Lives. Could many of them say sincerely, that they had rather have their Minds full of Knowledg, and their Hearts inclin'd to obey the Gospel, and be poor, despis'd, hated and miserable, than to be rich, esteem'd, and have but a small Knowledg of the Christian Doctrine, and observe it as 'tis commonly done ?

Notwithstanding this lamentable Disposition, they profess to live like honest Men, they put on the outside, and as it were the Garments of Religion ; but they unluckily stop there, and the Conduct of their Life contradicts, as I have shew'd, their Profession. They commonly behave them-

themselves as if the Christian Religion was wholly shut up within the Walls of Churches, and consisted only in some outward Practices; whereas the Apostles teach us, that what Religion, next to the Worship of God, requires from us, chiefly consists in our manner of living and conversing with other Men.

If we examine somewhat carefully the publick Behaviour of most Christians, we may take notice that they observe no Rule of Justice among themselves, but inasmuch as it agrees with their private Interest. If they are the better for breaking the Rules of Justice, that is, if the doing of it will prove advantageous to them, and they neither endanger their Reputation, nor expose themselves to the Severity of the Laws for so doing, they never fail to break them. They will be guilty of any Fraud and Cheat, provided they be not sued for it, and their Reputation be not so blemish'd as to do them some Prejudice in the World. They commonly call an *honest Man*, a Man who can't be punish'd by the Laws, and lives not worse than others, according to the Customs of the Place he is in. A *good Man*, according to the Notions of the Vulgar, is a Man who keeps a better Outside, with respect to what we call Piety, that is, with respect to publick Exercises, the frequenting whereof is a very equivocal Sign of a *good inward*

inward Disposition. We see every minute some Men careful of that sort of Duties, and who seem to be pious Men by their Discourses; but nevertheless they are as greedy and unjust as those who profess no Vertue. If we examine thoroughly those *good and honest Men*, we shall see very often that we are only beholden to the Laws and Custom for their outward and seeming Vertue, and not at all to the Gospel, which they know but very imperfectly, and observe but as far as it serves their ends.

If Justice is so generally violated, what shall we say of *Charity*, which goes much farther? Do we see many People who concern themselves in the Reputation of their Neighbours, as in their own? Are they slow and reserv'd in judging of them? Do they not presently pass an ill Sentence upon them, without minding the wrong it may do them? On the contrary, have they not much ado to have a good Opinion of them? Their Judgment of the Sentiments of those who are not of the same Christian Society, is most unjust. They damn them without any more ado, without having any regard to their Manners, or understanding their Opinions: And then they do them all the harm they can in this Life. Nay, such a Conduct, so contrary to Charity, is accounted *Zeal and Devotion*; and Christians fancy (who would

would believe it, were it not to be seen every day?) that they shall inherit Heaven, by cruelly tearing and persecuting their Neighbours. Meekness and Charity, so often mention'd in the New Testament, are look'd upon by those false Zealots as Indifferency to any Religion; and, if they are to be believ'd, Fury and Cruelty are the only Characters of a good Christian. Those who should teach others to be modest in their Judgment of their Neighbours, and the Doctrines they understand not, (which are Duties Humanity should teach us) spend their Life in exasperating ignorant People, by their publick and private Discourses, against other Christians; and are as good Patterns of judging rashly, and persecuting without any Pity, as they are ill Examples of living like Christians.

As for the other temporal Interests of our Neighbours, how few are they, I will not say, who look upon them as their own, (as they should, according to the Gospel) but who endeavour to procure them, as they might without prejudicing themselves? It seems, that provided we live well, and have nothing to fear for our selves, 'tis no matter whether others groan, for example, under excessive Labour, to earn what is absolutely necessary to them, and live in the fear of begging by the first Misfortune that befalls them.

Others

Others may be without any thing, but we must want nothing; there is no Reward too little for them, and no Profit too great for us; 'tis enough if they don't starve; but as for us no Riches can be too vast. In many Places a Man is accounted even a *Person of exemplary Vertue*, when he endeavours not to hurt his Neighbour, tho he does him no good, being nevertheless able to help him, without prejudicing himself. Charity, among that sort of Men is, if I may say so, but a *negative Vertue*, which consists in doing no harm, not in doing good, and eagerly promoting our Neighbours Interests, as the Gospel commands. 'Tis extremely difficult for these Men to part with their Indolence in the behalf of those who stand in need of them, when 'tis not their Interest; but the least thing is sufficient to engage them to act against their Neighbours, or at least to do nothing for them.

If we consider the other part of Charity which concerns the Poor, who want our Alms; how many are they, I will not say, who deprive themselves of what is necessary to them, or give away their *Overplus*, but who keep any proportion between their vain or foolish Expences and their Alms.

If among Christians we look for the Vertues we owe, if I may say so, to ourselves, such as Modesty or Humility, Ab-
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stinence from unlawful Pleasures, Patience in Adversities ; I doubt whether we shall find more of them than among some of the antient or modern Heathens, provided we be willing to do Justice to both ; however 'tis certain at least, that they are very scarce, especially in an eminent degree. Nay, it often falls out, that those who pretend to those Vertues more than others, are mere Hypocrites, as one may easily observe, if their whole Behaviour be carefully examin'd. Humility or Modesty hinder them not from hunting after Preferments, which they are not fit for ; from making extraordinary Expences, when they have got them ; nor from treating Men contemptuously, whose Vertues and Talents shine infinitely above theirs. Abstinence from Pleasures hinders them not from enjoying at least all the Conveniences, and when they can, all the Delights of this Life, whilst they preach Frugality to others. They will do, or are ready to do any thing, rather than lose the Favour of those, who gave them, or keep them in the Employments they enjoy. The highest degree of their Virtue consists in doing nothing but what will please the Multitude ; and if they are afraid to be censur'd, for having perform'd one of their Christian Duties, or to draw Hatred on themselves by practising it, we must not expect to see them

prefer Obedience to God's Commandments, to the Reputation they endeavour to get, or keep among Men. The rest of Christians do the like, not to make their Rulers ashamed.

Sixthly, The Unbelievers who compare the Christian Morals with the Manners of the Christians, say they can't believe that those Morals are reveal'd by God, seeing the Effects of them are so inconsiderable. They say they can't apprehend that a Religion reveal'd, as we affirm, for the Good and Happiness of Mankind, and so excellent above all others, made not a greater Alteration in the World in what concerns good Manners. But if they had reflected enough upon the Nature of the Christian Religion, and the State of *Europe* and *Asia*, before it was establish'd, they would spare that Objection.

They should remember that the Christian Religion contains some Laws, as I have already said, which tho admirable in themselves, force no body to observe them, that there may be room for Rewards and Punishments. So that we must not wonder if they are violated, as all others are, especially if it be consider'd that those Rewards and Punishments concern another Life. Men, tho perswaded of the Truth of the Christian Religion, look upon them as remote, and are so affected with outward Objects, which
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work upon their Senses or Imagination, that the present Time prevails over the future. Besides, it ought to be observ'd that there are different degrees of *Perswasion*, tho Perswasion it self be most true. No body doubts of some considerable Facts of antient History; for example, that *Cesar* overcame *Pompey*; however there is some Difference between the degree of this Perswasion, and the degree of that whereby every body is perswaded of what he sees. Tho those who have read the Roman Authors that were contemporary, and those who spoke of it in the next Century, doubt not at all of *Cesar's* Victory; yet it must be confess'd, that the Perswasion arising from what we have seen, is stronger and more lively. The Christians who believe the Divinity of the Laws of the Gospel, and are sometimes mov'd with it, are, by the same Reason I just now alledg'd, more mov'd with the present Pleasure of giving up themselves to some Passion; and so this last Motion overcomes the other. Jesus Christ foresaw that Disorder, and said that few Men would observe his Commandments, and many break them, * as * Part II. I have already observ'd elsewhere. Chap. 2.

But it will be said, Why does not God make the Rewards and Punishments of the Gospel as sensible to Men as what they see? Why do they not see, if I may say so, Paradise

radise and Hell open'd; good Men in the one, and wicked Men in the other? I answer, that if it were so, those who obey God, not only because of the Rewards and Punishments, but out of Thankfulness, and because they are convinc'd that his Laws are just and reasonable, could not be distinguish'd from those who obey only out of Fear, and wish that God had been pleas'd to let them satisfy their Passions. For 'tis certain that if Rewards and Punishments were made sensible, every body would pay to God the same outward Obedience.

Besides, tho it is most certain that the Christian Religion is not observ'd as it should be, and that the Difference between the Manners of Christians and Heathens is not so great as it ought to be; yet it must be confess'd that Christianity hath several great Advantages above Paganism. First, there is a great Difference between a Commonwealth that hath good Laws, which teach exactly to distinguish Good from Evil; and a Commonwealth, the Laws whereof approve or suffer some Crimes which are very prejudicial to Society. In the former, good Laws keep at least part of the Citizens to their Duty, and hinder others from running themselves into great Excesses; but in the other the Law-giver lets loose all manner of Vices, and puts no Bounds to them:
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from whence it comes to pass that an infinite Number of Men give up themselves to them. The same may be said, in several respects, of Christianity and Paganism; but I shall only alledge two Examples. Indeed the Notions of Justice and Charity, which the Gospel hath brought into the World, have not been so effectual as they should have been; but however those Notions are the Reason why a horrible Custom practis'd among the Romans hath been condemn'd. They took great Pleasure in seeing Men kill one another, or fight with wild Beasts. So cruel a Diversion lasted during many Ages at Rome; nor was the Humanity of the Roman People, so much boasted of by their Historians, offended at it in the least. The same People as well as the Grecians were so horribly addicted to Fornication and Sodomy, that they never imagin'd there was any harm in it, provided it might not prejudice their temporal Interests. Those who will read their comical and satyrical Poets, will not only see the Matter of Fact, but also the sad Consequences of those Debaucheries. Among Christians one of them has been always detested, and not so common; and the other has not been so great as amongst the Heathens, because they are both condemn'd in the Gospel. The Heathens gave up themselves to a thousand infamous Debaucheries,

cheries, not only without being punish'd for it, but also without feeling any Remorses of Conscience, because they knew not that they were unlawful. Hence it is that they never gave over their Lewdness, but when the Body being worn out, could no longer answer the Disorder of the Mind; and that they never shew'd any Sorrow for it, whereby Youth might be deterr'd from it. All that old Men could say to young Men was, to enjoy the Pleasures of the Flesh only as much as they were consistent with the Welfare of their Families. But under the Gospel the Knowledg Men have of doing Evil, when they give up themselves to Lewdness, is as it were a Bridle, which stops a great many in the midst of their Pleasures; and a Leaven which often works Repentance, and excites Men to deter others from doing the like.

I will not say that Justice is much better administr'd among Christians than elsewhere, but it can't be deny'd that their Civil and Political Laws are better. What may be the Reason of it? 'Tis because the Laws of the Gospel have settl'd the Notions of Good and Evil, which were uncertain among other Nations, or rather have introduc'd them anew: from whence it is that those who do Evil dare not assert it; and that many Crimes are not daily committed, which otherwise would be
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committed openly. To live somewhat modestly among the Greeks and the Romans, one needed to have been well bred up, or to have learn'd Philosophy ; nor did this hinder them from doing several unjust things, which Excess only could make infamous. But among Christians Men learn whether they will or not, the Laws that condemn them ; and no body will be so bold as to say, that the least Unjustice is allow'd them. Princes abuse not their Authority, as they did in Paganism, for the same Reason ; and Subjects enjoy more quietly and safely the Fruits of their Labours, especially in the Places where the Knowledg of the Christian Religion is greater than in others.

C H A P. VI.

That Unbelievers can't conclude that the Christian Religion is false, because the Divines, whom they know, answer not their Objections well, or maintain some false Doctrines, as true ones, and as being the Doctrine of Christ.

IF I say in general that one of the chief things that lead Men into Incredulity who have Wit and Judgment enough, is the weak Answers which are often return'd

turn'd to their Objections, and the absurd Doctrines which are maintain'd against them as true ones: No Christian Society will contradict me, because they accuse one another of very great Errors. Thus, without naming any in particular, I leave to every one the liberty of making such Applications as he thinks fit.

Forasmuch as there are many things difficult to apprehend in Systems of Divinity, which raise great Difficulties in the Minds of those who read, or hear talk of them; 'tis no wonder if Men of Sagacity and Penetration propose some Doubts to Divines. Nay, according to the Supposition of every Christian Society, *viz.* that all others err in something, it cannot be wondr'd at, if it be said that Unbelievers offer some Objections to Divines, which they can't resolve according to their *Hypothesis*, or which they resolve by contradicting themselves. Divines upbraid one another with it. Let us therefore suppose that a Man, not altogether ignorant, observes in the Society in which he was born, that the manner after which some Doctrines of the Christian Religion are explain'd, is subject to great Difficulties, or is altogether false. Let us suppose further, that the Divines of his Country are very learn'd Men, and understand the Christian Religion better than others; an Opinion common enough, especially among those

those who never went out of their Country, or never read the Books of other Sects. When they perceive that the Divines whom they consult satisfy them not, or maintain palpable Falsties, they conclude from thence that the Religion of their Country is not true, and consequently that the Christian Religion is altogether false. If it happens that a Man having such Thoughts, never reads the Works of other Christians, who are free from the Errors he is offended at; the more he lives, the more he confirms himself in his Opinion; because as soon as an Error hath been found out, the longer it is thought of, the better it is known. When Men know nothing better about the Subject in question, and have not Penetration and Learning enough to find out Truth of themselves, they can hardly forbear doubting of every thing, because they presently suspect that the other Parts of Divinity which they have not examin'd, are not better; and observe that the same Doctrine, whereof they have found out the Falstiy, is accounted as essential as others. But let us suppose again, that a Man, taken up with other Business, and who has no time to spare for such an Examination, (as there are a great many) comes to read Books of Controversy written by ingenious Men of both sides, he will often perceive that both Parties at-
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tack very well, and defend themselves ill. That Man will conclude from thence, and often with Reason, that both Parties are in the wrong; the more he hears them one after another, the more he'll be convinc'd of it, and at last he'll believe that there is nothing true, because he hath not Parts enough to distinguish Truth from Falshood. If we add that there are some other external and internal Motives, which make him incline to Unbelief, as there are but too many, that Man will get into a Scepticism almost incurable, or into a formal Unbelief, out of which he will hardly be able to extricate himself.

What I have propos'd as Suppositions is really to be found in a great part of *Christendom*; and there are a great many People in *Italy, France, Spain and Germany*, (for I must tell it, and I ought not to conceal that I don't follow the particular Opinions which prevail in those Places) there is, I say, an infinite Number of Men in the same case, as I have describ'd. They see some Opinions manifestly false, establish'd in those vast Countries by a publick Authority: if they offer any Objections, they are pitifully resolv'd; and then if they dare reply any thing, they are overwhelm'd with Censures and Threatnings, not to say that they are sent to the Inquisition, and burnt if they grow obstinate. Nevertheless Divines maintain those

those Doctrines, tho evidently false, with great Heat; they make use of all their Wit and Eloquence to prove them. Many Lay-men who want not Penetration, but know no better, think that indeed this is the Christian Religion; and because they distinctly apprehend the Falsity of what is said, they conclude from thence that Religion is not true.

Others add to their Meditations the reading of some controversial Book of Roman Catholick and Protestant Authors; and they see that the latter altogether destroy the Doctrines of the Church of *Rome*. They rightly conclude from thence, that they are false, and the utmost Endeavours of their Teachers can't free them from that Opinion. On the other hand, they often find some Books of Roman Catholick Authors, who attack well enough some particular Opinions of certain Protestants; and those Protestants are as unlucky in defending their own Opinions, as they are successful in assaulting those of the Roman Catholicks. They also think that those Protestants are in the wrong, and because their Examination reaches not to all the Sects separated from the Church of *Rome*, they confound them one with another, and condemn them alike; so that at last they perswade themselves that Truth is to be found no where. Besides other Motives which may confirm them in those

those Thoughts, and which I have already mention'd; they see two things which affect them so much, that they retain their Opinions for ever, if no better Books come into their Hands, or if no body frees them from the Doubts they are in.

The first is, that it clearly appears that 'tis the temporal Interest of Divines to maintain those Doctrines. Those who assert them with Heat, and declame with the greatest Violence against other Christian Societies, are preferr'd, and get the most considerable Dignities of the Party they are in. On the contrary, if any one seems to be modest, and thinks himself oblig'd in Conscience to be moderate towards those who are call'd *Hereticks* or *Heterodox*; he must needs be very much favour'd, if he be not excluded for ever from all sorts of Employment, and ruins not himself. In some Places that's enough to be altogether undone; and almost everywhere if any intimates that he approves not all the Opinions of the Party he is in, (tho he does it never so modestly) they shew him no Pity, he must suffer whatever Hatred and Cruelty can do, when they are cloth'd with the Pretence of Religion.

The second thing that confirms Unbelievers in their Disposition, is, that Divines will be Judges and Parties in controverted Doctrines, against the clearest Principles

principles of Equity, tho 'tis most evident that 'tis their Interest to favour one of the Parties. Tho their Decisions be never so unreasonable and unsatisfactory, they must be submitted to, because they look upon them as good and solid. Nay, if they are to be believ'd, the Books of their Adversaries ought not to be read; or those who read them ought to do it with a Design of not approving their Arguments, otherwise they must undergo the Condemnation of their Parties.

Unbelievers, who are convinc'd of the Falsity of several particular Doctrines, and observe that they are maintain'd out of a worldly Interest, and by unjust and violent Means, conclude that Divines, and consequently all Christians, are factious People, and Enemies to Truth, as well as those who profess the other Religions which are seen in the World.

It can't be doubted but these are most violent Prejudices against some Christian Societies; but 'tis an easy thing to shew, that they ought not to involve all Christianity in general. First, Unbelievers can't suppose without Examination, as they do on this occasion, that the Notion Men have of the Christian Religion in their Country, or that of some Divines whom they have read, is really the same with that of its Founders. Some Alterations may have by degrees crept into the Doctrine

ctrine of the Christians whom they know and so it may be very different from that of Christ and his Apostles. No body can be sure of the contrary, without going to the Source, to compare it with the Streams which are said to flow from it; that is, without reading the Writings of the Apostles, and comparing their Doctrine with that which is now pretended to be the true Doctrine of the Founders of Christianity. This Unbelievers are necessarily oblig'd to do before they affirm that the Doctrine of Jesus Christ is false. Else they would imitate corrupt Judges, who vouchsafe not to examine the Instruments of a Suit in Law, but give their Sentence at the first Report of it. I am perswaded that if the Unbelievers of the above-mention'd Places would undertake that Examination, they would presently see that most of the Doctrines which they dislike are not to be found in the Writings of the Apostles, and consequently that whatever Christians think now, ought not to be ascrib'd to them.

The same thing ought to be observ'd every where, and Men ought not to judge of the Gospel according to the Opinions that are commonly receiv'd where they live; or, which is worse, to condemn it from hearing a silly Preacher, who represents it quite otherwise than it is. Yet there are many People who entertain no
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favourable Thoughts of the Christian Religion, by reason of the Explications thereof, which they hear from the Pulpits, which are but too often ill provided. A great many things spoken there, are so far from bearing a severe Examination of judicious Men, that they could scarce be allow'd in the Conversation of any Persons not altogether destitute of common Sense. That sort of Discourses can't, without great Injustice, be confounded with the *Word of God*; tho there are some who affect to give them that Name, as if such Preachers were inspir'd Apostles, and authoriz'd with Miracles. They should have a greater respect for the Gospel than to call such Meditations by the same Name with the Discourses of Christ and his Apostles. I had not made this Remark, were it not that such Expressions give occasion to Unbelievers to despise Christianity, which deserves as much to be admir'd by the most penetrating and solid Wits, as many Sermons deserve to be despis'd by the meanest and most illiterate Persons.

As no body could bear the Injustice of that Man, who should judg of the Opinions of an Author by the Discourses of another, who perhaps understands them not, and whose Interest it is to explain them otherwise, and then pretends he may with Reason vent his Explications as infallible: so Unbelievers can't ascribe to the Apostles

stles the Opinions which they hear preach'd, as Apostolical Doctrines, before they have carefully compar'd them with the Writings of the Apostles, unless they are willing to be look'd upon as the most unjust of Men.

Secondly, Unbelievers are guilty of another Fault, which is not much less than the foregoing, when by reason of the false Doctrines which they have read in the Writings of some Divines, or heard them preach, they reject all Christianity. For it must be granted, that 'tis not impossible but many Truths may be mix'd with Lies: and as it can't be said that a Book contains nothing but Truth, because some few Truths are to be found in it; so it can't be affirm'd that every thing in it is false, because some Lies have been found in it. Is there, for example, any profane History, either antient or modern, without a mixture of Truth and Falshood? Yet no body says that History contains nothing that's true and certain. They endeavour only to distinguish what is true from what is false. The like ought to be practis'd with respect to the Explications of Christian Doctrines which we read or hear. We ought neither wholly to reject them nor embrace them, because there may be a Mixture of Truth and Falshood. We ought, as I said before, to compare them with the Writings
of

of the Founders of Christianity, and judge by those Writings of Religion it self, and of what is true in the Opinions of modern Divines; this is, if I may say so, the Touch-Stone by which only the true Doctrine of the Apostles can be known.

Thirdly, Unbelievers undoubtedly know, that a Truth changes not its Nature for being ill defended. We see every day very good Causes ill pleaded by some Lawyers, who understand not their Profession. Nay 'tis confess'd among all Christians, that there are a great many Books whose Authors are really engag'd in the Defence of Truth, but they do it so ill, that it would certainly be condemn'd if it had no better Support. Many People, for example, who have not studied well the Writings of the Apostles, say they see no Character of Divinity in the Doctrine of the Gospel, and can't convince an Unbeliever of it; but nevertheless they believe it to be Divine with as great a Certainty as if they perceiv'd the *Finger of God* in every part of it, because they are, say they, inwardly perswaded of it by the Holy Ghost, without knowing why. That's the Cant of a perfect Phanatick, who equals, without being aware of it, the Gospel with the Alcoran, and all the false Religions, the Followers whereof may all say, as he does, that they are perswaded of it by a secret

and inward Operation of God upon their Hearts. But the Apostles never said any such thing; all their Preaching consists in some Facts, and in good Reasonings, attended with the miraculous Gifts they had; and 'tis by such Means they pretended to prove the Divinity of their Doctrine. So that we should wrong them very much should we believe that they taught their Doctrine could not be embrac'd by the means of Knowledge, but by a mere *Enthusiasm*.

Others, to do the Christian Religion a greater Honour, ascribe to the Apostles an Art which they themselves seriously * say they have not. They set forth their Stile as an admirable Pattern of Eloquence, which exceeds that of the Grecians and Romans. What follows from thence? Unbelievers read the Writings of those Holy Men, to seek what they are told is contain'd in them; and because they don't find it, they fancy that those who said so, design'd to deceive them; and thereupon being exasperated against them who grounded in part the Truth of the Doctrine of the Apostles upon their wonderful Stile, they wholly reject it. They could not be blam'd for that, if the Apostles themselves boasted of their Eloquence; but seeing they say quite the contrary, 'tis a great piece of Injustice to condemn them as Impostors, upon the

Asse-

* 1 Cor.

1. 17. &

11. 4, 13,
&c.

Assertion of those who ascribe to them what they never had, nor pretended to have.

The true Character of the Apostles Stile, to say so by the by, is this. First, 'tis simple and plain, such as is the Stile of those who propose some things, of which they are fully perswaded. Secondly, 'tis a Stile without any Ornaments of Rhetorick, whether it be with respect to the Choice of the Words, or the Disposition. If a thousand sublime Strokes are to be found in it, they come from the things they say, which are very sublime, not from the Words or Order. Thirdly, we must add to it that Providence undoubtedly watch'd over their manner of writing, that they should always say Truth; and lest, if they had express'd themselves ill, they should be misunderstood by their Readers. But this is not a fit Place to treat of that Subject. I only made those Remarks to hinder Unbelievers from taking Advantage at the ill Rhetorick of some Defenders of Christianity, who contradict the Apostles without being aware of it.

'Tis manifest in general, that the Defects of those who defend Truth, ought not to prejudice it; and I declare as to my self, that I don't desire at all to be believ'd in any thing, but when it has been examin'd and compar'd with the Wri-

tings of the Apostles ; or that any of my Thoughts should be ascrib'd to them, but when they have been found in their Works. If I have been mistaken in any thing, I desire those Mistakes may be ascrib'd to me, and not at all to the Religion I vindicate.

There is no need I should say here, that the Apostles had no temporal Interest to move them to preach such a Doctrine. I have already said so elsewhere, and I will prove it more at large in my first Letter at the end of this Discourse. I will not repeat neither that they pretended not their Doctrine should be receiv'd with any Examination, because I have prov'd it in the first Chapter of this second Part. So that if Self-Interest and Ambition are often the Reason why Divines maintain now some Opinions, and after a manner unbecoming Christianity ; 'tis their Fault, not the Apostles, who can be charg'd with no such thing.

After those general Observations I must set down some particular Examples of false Doctrines, which hinder Unbelievers from believing the Gospel. 'Tis but too true that one might write large Volumes about that Matter, but I shall be contented to alledg three or four Examples of Doctrines which offend Unbelievers, and are contrary to the Doctrine of the Apostles.

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There are some People now who pretend that we ought scarce to make use of Reason in Matters of Religion. They maintain that we ought to believe its Divinity, without knowing why ; that when the Question is about the Sense of the Revelation, or the Books which contain it, we ought not to reason, neither to discover it ; and that we ought to believe even the things that are most contrary to Reason, rather than forsake the literal Sense. They are so full of this Thought, *viz.* that Reason may overthrow all Divinity, if those who apply themselves to it are allow'd to make use of it ; and if they see any body who reasons better than ordinary Divines do, or has any Principles somewhat different from theirs, which he has embrac'd by using his Reason, they slander him as a dangerous Man, because he ventures to reason about the receiv'd Doctrines. Such a Character is always attended with Hatred, and stirs ill-affected Persons against those who receiv'd it from Heaven ; as if it were impossible for a Divine to live quietly with a Man who endeavours to reason well, and grounds the Christian Religion upon undeniable Principles. Others will have us humbly to submit to the Decisions of those whose Profession it is publickly to explain Religion, without mistrusting them, or reasoning at all, because we ought to look up-

on them as infallible, tho we have no Proof of it. They think 'tis impossible for most Christians to examine those Doctrines ; and their best way is, as they say, blindly to follow their Guides.

Such Discourses which are commonly to be heard from the Pulpits, and elsewhere, have made long ago a great many Unbelievers. For the first thing that comes then into ones Mind, is, that those who speak at this rate are not very sure of what they say, and design to deceive others, because there is nothing, tho never so false and absurd, but what may be maintain'd by the same Principle. If we were told the same thing in our ordinary Affairs, we would really think that those who say so design to deceive us. If they would sell something to us, and we were told that we must not examine it, we would presently suspect that they design'd to cheat us. In Matters of Religion, as well as in other things, we have no other Guide but Reason to distinguish a false Religion from a true one. Besides, 'tis only by the use of Reason we can find out the Sense of the Words contain'd in those Books wherein we know the Revelation is. Nevertheless those Men would have us to read those Books with an unlimited Credulity, and be ready to receive whatever we are told, tho it be never so contrary to all our Notions. They are afraid, as
soon

soon as they hear of a Man who is only for Reason, and whom insignificant Words and an ill-grounded Authority can't satisfy. Unbelievers conclude from thence that there is a Design upon them, and that Divines very well perceive that the Doctrines which they would introduce can't be maintain'd, seeing they will not allow that they should be examin'd. And because that strange Doctrine is cri'd up as one of the chief Doctrines of Christianity, those who have not carefully read the Writings of the Apostles, fancy that they have taught it, and involve them in the same Suspicions with some modern Divines.

When Divines have taught Principles so contrary to the Nature of Men, they preach *Transubstantiation* and other such Doctrines to credulous Men, which they insinuate by virtue of that Maxim of not reasoning in Matters of Religion. But Unbelievers fail not to perceive the Falsity of those Doctrines, and persist the more in their Thoughts concerning the Falsity of the Christian Religion.

But they should observe that the Apostles teach us no where that we ought not to use our Reason to examine whether Religion is true or not, or to know the Sense of their Words. On the contrary, they suppose every where that we ought to examine what they say, and not believe it be-

fore we are sure that they say nothing but Truth. They also suppose that we are rational Creatures, and able to put a good Sense upon their Words, by observing all the Rules that are made use of to understand the Language of other Men. They no where say that they teach us some things that seem to be or are contrary to Reason, and that we must part with our Notions to embrace them. They knew very well that they were to deal with Men who judg of nothing but by acquiescing in their own Reasonings.

'Tis true we comprehend not perfectly all the things mention'd in the Writings of the Apostles, such as are, for example, the Divine Properties; but we form at least some Notions of them which are not at all contrary to Reason; there is no need we should have an exact and adequate Notion of them to be sav'd. Reason also teaches us that we can't know exactly this sort of things, nor many others, and that we must not judg of things we understand not. 'Tis also a critical and grammatical Rule, to decide nothing about an equivocal or obscure Expression. So that we ought not to sacrifice our Reason and our grammatical Rules to *Faith*, as if it was contrary to them, in order to believe what the Apostles say; but we must remember that we have not exact Notions of every thing, and ought to judg only of
such

such things as are known to us. We ought not neither to part with the Rules of Criticks, which are grounded upon good Sense and the constant use of Languages, to understand what the Apostles say. On the contrary, we ought to make use of Reason and Critical Rules in their whole Extent; and we shall see that there is nothing in the Doctrine of the Apostles that clashes in the least with the Light of Reason, or that cannot be explain'd, as much as 'tis necessary, by good Critical Rules.

Those who reject any of them, do it because they have introduc'd new Doctrines into the Christian Religion, which they falsely ascribe to the Apostles; and both because such Doctrines can't bear the Test of Reason, and because they can't reason well themselves, or make a good use of Critical Rules: for example, what is call'd the *Real Presence* of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist, or *Transubstantiation*, which can't be believ'd without forsaking Reason, nor be found in the Writings of the Apostles, by using good Grammatical Rules; the real Presence, I say, or *Transubstantiation*, are Doctrines which the Apostles never thought of. Divines declame against Reason and Criticks in the behalf of those new Doctrines, not at all in the behalf of the Doctrine of the Apostles.

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For my part, having studi'd those Matters as much as I can, I think I may affirm that no Proposition can be extracted out of the Gospels, or any other Writings of the Apostles, which being express'd in their Words, is not perfectly agreeable to Reason, if it be interpreted by the same Grammatical Rules, as all other Authors are. Moreover, I affirm that one need suppose nothing but what is most reasonable, to know that the Christian Religion is of Divine Revelation.

Some Divines who have not studi'd the Holy Scripture well, maintain another thing, which is not less proper to hinder Infidels from believing in Jesus Christ, than the Maxims I have confuted. They say that many Commands of the Gospel are Arbitrary Precepts, whereof no other good Reason can be given but the mere Will of God; or, that he gave them to Men to humble them. They believe that God would have some Mysteries in Religion, such as the *Real Presence*, or *Transubstantiation*, to mortify Man's Pride, who understands nothing of them. They say that to deny ones Passions, as the Gospel commands, is a Commandment grounded upon no other Reason but the Will of God.

It can't be doubted but that when we are sure a thing is of Divine Revelation, we must believe it, or practise it, tho we should

should not apprehend the Reasons of it; and this many Divines say concerning several Ceremonial Precepts of the Law of *Moses*. Some learned * Men undertook to shew the contrary with respect to those Ceremonies, and it may be said in general, that they have not been unsuccessful in it. But as for the Commandments of the Gospel, one may boldly assert that there is none, of which 'tis a hard thing to give a good Reason, supposing humane Nature in the State it is in.

* Mar-
sham,
Spencer,
&c.

Nothing can be more false and contrary to the Nature of the Gospel than to fancy that God design'd in part to shew only that he is Master, by enjoining some Commandments which have no relation with the Good of Mankind. Religion was only reveal'd for us, not for God, who, absolutely speaking, neither wants what we think of him, nor the Worship we pay him. He manifested himself to us, only to make us happy; and gave us some Laws fit to make us enjoy a Happiness as great as can be here, if all Mankind would observe them; and at the same time fit to lead to an eternal Felicity those who obey them, notwithstanding the ill Examples of others.

For example, the Gospel commands us to deny our Passions, or *our selves*, which is the same thing; not only to give to God that mark of our Submission to his Or-

Orders, but for the Good of humane Society. To *deny ones self*, or ones Passions, signifies only to prefer the Observation of the Commandments of the Gospel to ones unruly Desires. Now all those Commandments tend to the Good of Men, and there is none but what is of that Nature. Let us suppose that a Man who has been injur'd by another desires to revenge himself; if he reflects upon what the Gospel commands him, he will find that 'tis one of those Desires he ought to deny. The Reason of it is, because if he should revenge himself, he on whom he should do it would not fail to revenge himself too; and so there could be no end of it, which would altogether disturb the Society. Wherefore God who form'd it, and protects it, forbids Revenge, and declares he will punish those that shall break that Commandment. Let all other Desires that are contrary to the Commands of the Gospel be examin'd, and it will be found that they can't be satisfi'd without hurting humane Society.

However it will be said, that when the Gospel commands us to deny our Desires rather than break any of its Commandments, or to suffer Death for it, if it be necessary; it has no regard to the Good of the Society, but the Will of God. But if we carefully consider it, we shall find that Men can scarce do any thing more use-

useful to Mankind than that. It is undoubtedly useful to them to observe the Laws of Christ, which are so advantageous to them; and there is no Example more effectual to encourage them to that Observation than that of those who had rather die than break any of those Laws. If all Men were so dispos'd, 'tis manifest they would contribute as much as they could to one another's Happiness, and *would love their Neighbours as themselves*; so that those who sacrifice their Life to bring others to the Obedience of the Gospel by their Example, do a thing very useful to the Society. 'Tis therefore false that the Laws of the Gospel are Arbitrary Laws, and no Commandments given to Men for their Good.

'Tis also false, that God would have Mysteries in Religion altogether incomprehensible, only to humble Man. The Doctrine of the *Real Presence* of Christ's Body in the Eucharist is no Apostolical Doctrine; and the Apostles have taught none, of which we can have no Notion, not so much as a confus'd one, as it may be said of that. To believe a thing, 'tis not necessary to have an exact and distinct *Idea* of it, but we must have at least a general and confus'd Notion of it. For no body can believe what he understands not at all; seeing to believe that a Proposition is true, is to acquiesce in the Relation which

which is perceiv'd between the Terms it is made of, as Logicians teach, and none can acquiesce in a Relation that is not perceiv'd.

For example: when I am told, *the Dead shall rise*, I understand not only the meaning of those Words, *the Dead*, and *to rise*, but also clearly perceive the Relation which is said to be between those two things, tho I don't know distinctly the Manner and Circumstances of the Resurrection. But if I was told, *the Dead shall rise and not rise at the same time*, without any Equivocation in the words *dead* and *to rise*, perceiving no relation between an Affirmation and a Negation, I could not believe it. The same may be said of all contradictory Propositions, they can't be an Object of Faith, which receives nothing but what it understands, at least in some measure. Such is the Doctrine of the *Real Presence*, which contains several such Propositions.

When the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles are propos'd to Unbelievers, as undeniable Proofs of their Divine Mission, they fail not to question the Truth of them. The chief Reason they alledg to make that History suspected, is the false Miracles which are now given out as true ones, to keep People in their Duty by this pious Fraud. Those who make use of that Art, or endeavour to vindicate those pretended

tended Miracles, can reply nothing to Unbelievers, without condemning themselves, or betraying the Christian Religion. They are far from confessing that they are in the wrong, they boldly maintain that there is no more reason to believe the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles, than to acknowledg the Truth of their modern Miracles. In the mean time the Unbelievers, who see that the latter are mere Impostures, fancy the former were so too. Those who cast in their way that Stumbling-block, are bound to remove it, and acknowledg the Truth, unless they will be look'd upon as Men of no Judgment, or less Conscience.

But tho Unbelievers may triumph over that sort of Men, who undertake to assert some Facts which cannot be maintain'd, they can't say against Christians in general, that the Miracles on which their Faith is grounded, are like those which are said to be wrought every Day. First, Christ and his Apostles affected not to work Miracles every minute, and out of Ostentation; such as are those that are now talk'd of. Secondly, Christ and his Apostles, and those in whose behalf those Miracles were wrought, got no Money by publishing them abroad, as 'tis now practis'd by those to whom those Churches belong, wherein they are said to be wrought. That very thing, *viz.* that the Opinion
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of Miracles being wrought in a certain Place, brings Wealth to the Master of it, is enough to make one rightly suspect whatever is said about it. Thirdly, The Miracles on which the Gospel is grounded, were done in the midst of the Enemies of the Christian Religion, among whom it was not safe to bear witness to those Miracles; and on the contrary, those who having examin'd them, should have discover'd the Falstiy of them, had nothing to fear. Such a Discovery had been very acceptable to the Jews and Heathens. But now Miracles are wrought among Men ready to believe any thing, or at least to say they believe it, for fear of being deliver'd to the *Inquisition*, where it is set up, or of drawing on themselves the Hatred of the *Mob*, which sometimes is not less to be fear'd than that dreadful Tribunal. To be sure that the Testimony of another is well-grounded, he ought to have the liberty to say the contrary: But when he exposes himself to Danger, if he says the contrary, his Testimony is of no weight. Besides, to be sure of the Truth of a Fact, one ought to have the liberty of examining it, but no body dares do that now, with respect to modern Miracles, in the Places wherein they are look'd upon as true. Thus there is a vast Difference between the Certainty of the Miracles wrought in the beginning of
 Chri-

Christianity, and what is said for those of our time. None but those who want either Judgment or Sincerity, will compare the one with the other.

But I must not forget here, that Unbelievers pretend to take advantage of what I have suppos'd, *viz.* that there are no Miracles now. They say, that if there is no Reason to make us believe that they are necessary now; there is none neither that can perswade us that there was any formerly, because the only Reason that could oblige God to work Miracles, many Centuries ago, was the Incredulity of Men which could not be cur'd any other way, and that the same Reason subsists still. So that if they are to be believ'd, God is not less oblig'd to work Miracles out of his Goodness, in the behalf of those who doubt now of the Truth of the Christian Religion, than he was in the time of the Apostles.

In answer to it I say, First, that the Proofs we have of the Truth of antient Miracles make them as it were sensible, if we reflect upon it; so that they may also be of use to cure our Doubts. It was necessary that God should work Miracles to establish the Christian Religion; but being establish'd, they are no longer necessary, because the History of Religion preserves the Proofs of those that were done, at its first Establishment. But it will be

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said,

said, that the Truth of that History is doubted of, and that therefore new Miracles are now requir'd.

I answer in the second Place, That if the Proofs of the Truth of that Doctrine are good, as we affirm, and if they are doubted of only out of an ill Principle, they have no reason to complain of God's Goodness. If there remain'd no Proof of the Truth of the History of Christ and his Apostles, it might be said that God has forsaken us, and deals with us much worse than with those in whose behalf he wrought Miracles formerly. But having very good Reasons to believe that History to be true, they ought to be to us instead of Miracles. This being so, 'tis manifest that Men have not now the same Reason to wish for Miracles, as when the Christian Religion was not yet establish'd.

Thirdly, it ought to be observ'd, that to require new Miracles from God, with any shew of Reason, Men should have made a right use of the Means they have to know the Truth, so that after a careful and impartial Examination they could not be satisfi'd about the thing they inquir'd after, but must doubt still of it whether they would or not. Upon this Supposition it might be said, that God would be in a manner oblig'd, by reason of his Goodness, to help Mens Incredulity. Hence it is that those who made a good use of the
Reve-

Revelation of the Old Testament, and might be apt to doubt of the Mission of Christ and his Apostles, not out of Obstinacy, but because the Proofs thereof were unknown to them, had the Advantage of seeing many Miracles in our Saviour's time. But let us suppose some Men of a quite contrary Disposition, who perform not the Duties which the Light of Reason teaches us, who have no Love for the Truth, who are full of a thousand ill-grounded Prejudices, and blinded with unruly Passions, who have examin'd nothing, but doubt of every thing out of a voluntary Perverseness of their Mind and Inclinations. Can such Men complain because God works no Miracles in their behalf? Will they be so bold as to say that they are worthy of new Favours, for having despis'd those which they had already receiv'd from him? If the Unbelievers of our time would but examine themselves by this Picture, they might easily find out the Answer we can return to them.

Fourthly, I affirm that Miracles would be of no use to such Men. The unbelieving Jews, in our Saviour's time, are a manifest Argument of what I say, seeing that being not able to deny his miraculous Works, they ascrib'd them to the Devils. The Unbelievers of our time would never want shifts to bring into question Mi-

acles wrought in their Presence, seeing they have found out several to hinder us from drawing any Consequence from those of Christ, supposing they are true. But of this I shall speak in my second Letter at the end of this Discourse.

Therefore it may be said, that God has more reason to work no Miracles in the behalf of the Unbelievers of our time, than to work any. And such was the Method of Christ. When he saw some obstinate Men, who requir'd from him some Miracles, he wrought none, because he saw they would not make a better use of them than of other Divine Graces, and would but thereby increase their Guilt.

* Mat. 13. The Evangelists observe*, that being
58. come to *Nazareth*, *he did not many mighty*

Mark 6. 5. *Works there, because of the Unbelief of the*
Inhabitants of that Town. Some unbelieving Teachers having requir'd of him

† Mat. 12. a Miracle more than once, † he deni'd
38. & 16. them, and referr'd them to that of his
1. Resurrection, whereof notwithstanding

they never had the Honour to be Eye-witnesses. Wherefore he sometimes ask'd those who desir'd that he would cure their

|| Mat. 9. Diseases, whether they believ'd || he could
29, &c. do it, to teach them that none deserves a new Grace but he that made a good use of others.

It would have been an absurd thing to expect or demand a Cure from him, had they not certainly known, by other

other Examples, or some good Reasons, that he was able to do it.

Those who suppose that the Goodness of God should incline him to deal otherwise with Unbelievers, suppose at once two things most absurd and altogether unworthy of Men who pretend to Reason. The first is, that God ought to have no respect to the Use Men have made of his Favours, but that the more they encrease their Unbelief, whatever the Reason of it may be, the more he is oblig'd to grant 'em new Graces ; so changing the Course of Nature, as soon as they are pleas'd, doubt of Revelation ; whereby the Conduct of God will depend upon the Will and Humour of Men. The second Absurdity that follows from thence is, that God would be oblig'd out of his Goodness to satisfy as many Parties as there are Unbelievers in the World, and every one according to his own Humour and Method. For every one of them would see some Miracles, and as it were put the Divine Providence to a Trial, without minding what it might have done at other times, or in other places. If any can brook those Consequences which necessarily follow from the Unbeliever's Objection ; there is no need we should longer dispute with him. From what hath been said it appears that God is not oblig'd to work Miracles now, because he wrought some formerly.

In those Places where the modern Miracles are not believ'd, there is an ill Custom, as well as in those where they are believ'd, which is very prejudicial to the Christian Religion, with regard to the Incredulous; and it is this: Several People who maintain some Doctrines of no great Moment and Certainty, with too great a Heat, are wont to say, to magnify their Zeal, that if the Opinion of their Adversaries was true, the Christian Religion would be lost, that one could be sure of nothing, and such other things. In the mean time their Adversaries endeavour to prove the Truth of their Opinions, and sometimes prove it so clearly, that the contrary Opinion cannot be maintain'd without Obstinacy. The Unbelievers who are as it were a third Party, and perform only the part of Spectators of those Quarrels, conclude from thence that the Christian Religion is not truer than the Doctrines which they see so well confuted; and those who have exaggerated too much the Importance of their Opinions, can't hinder the Unbelievers from drawing such a Consequence against them.

There are but too many Examples of that ill manner of disputing; but I shall alledg only one, which will be sufficient to make Men sensible of what I say. There have been many Disputes in this Age about the Antiquity of the Jewish *Vowels*. Some have

have maintain'd that they were invented by the *Masorethes* some Centuries after Christ. Others have pretended on the contrary, that they were at least as antient as *Esdra*s, and consequently grounded upon the Authority of the Prophets. The latter, to stir, if it were possible, all *Christendom* against their Adversaries, exclaim'd after a tragical manner, that this Dispute was about no less a thing than the Authority of the Old Testament, and of the whole Bible, which was destroy'd by those who asserted the Novelty of the Vowels. But *Ludovicus Cappellus* has shew'd in his *Arcanum Punctationis*, and its *Defence*, with as much Evidence as can be desir'd in a thing of that nature, that the *Masorethes* were the Authors of those Vowels. The most learned Criticks have imbrac'd his Opinion, and look'd upon those who maintain'd the contrary as obstinate Persons. The same happen'd with respect to another Dispute which that learned Man had concerning the *various Readings* of the Old Testament.

He prov'd that there are many Readings which may be preferr'd before those of our modern Copies. Did it follow from thence, as his Adversaries would have it, that the Authority of the Scripture should be destroy'd, Unbelievers would undoubtedly have reason to triumph, and it would be impossible to make

any tolerable Reply to them. But *Cappellus* shew'd very clearly that nothing can be more false than this Consequence, as well as that which is drawn from the Novelty of the Vowels; and so he freed the Authority of the Scripture from those Insults of Unbelievers, to which his Adversaries had expos'd it.

'Tis manifest that there are scarce any more effectual means to confirm Unbelievers in their Obstinacy, than the drawing of such Consequences. For they hear on the one side some grave and much esteem'd Teachers say after a doleful manner, that if certain Opinions are not true, then Religion is lost; and on the other hand, they see Men of great Learning not only acknowledge those Opinions, but also maintain them with very good Reasons. They conclude from thence that nothing can be less certain than Religion, by the Confession even of a Part of those that profess it. 'Tis to no purpose to undertake to prove the contrary to them, by rejecting some Opinions grounded upon very solid Arguments; whatever the Defenders of the opposite Opinion can tell them, will only serve to make them pass for conceited Men, and of no great Sincerity.

This helps them also to perceive in many Divines a strange Disposition, which would dishonour the Christian Religion, if it had any hand in it, *viz.* it does plainly

ly appear, that they seek not what's true, but what they think proper to maintain the Doctrines they have embrac'd. When they fancy that if a certain thing was believ'd, some of their Doctrines might be doubted of; they don't trouble themselves with inquiring whether their Fancy be ill grounded, or whether that thing can be prov'd or not, as they should do; but they cry out in a woful manner, *That such an Opinion is dangerous*; that is to say, it cannot be easily reconcil'd with Religion, as they fancy. This is the true Character of a Pleader, who is not very sure of being in the right; he suppresses whatever seems to him any way contrary to what he defends, whether it be true or false, if he is afraid it might appear from thence that he is in the wrong. Such is the Conduct of the Governour of a Place, who wanting Skill or Courage should say, that if some ill-fortifi'd and inconsiderable Out-work were taken by the Enemies, he must unavoidably surrender the Fortrefs. Those who observ'd the Conduct of both, would presently suspect the Pleader to be in the wrong, and the Governour to be sensible of the weakness of the Place, and that neither of them hopes to make a good Resistance.

Unbelievers have the same Thoughts concerning Divines, when they observe that they greedily collect and catch at what-

whatever can in any manner make their Cause better, or at least make it appear so. But what ought to be said, is, that those Divines don't know very well the Truth of Religion, and stick to it only by a Spirit of Faction or Interest. The Christian Religion is grounded upon clear and undeniable Arguments; it stands in need of no weak Reasons to support it; it needs but appear naked, and such as it came from Heaven, to put an end to all sorts of Difficulties. If any one who do's not understand it, and loves not Truth, but only the worldly Advantages that attend it, seem to be afraid for Religion; it will never want more able Defenders, who will be devoted to it out of a Principle worthy of so holy a Doctrine. They will never be afraid as long as Religion is only assaulted with Reasons and Arguments.

C H A P. VII.

That the Difficulties which may occur in the Christian Religion, ought not to make any doubt of the Truth thereof.

1. **T**HE abovemention'd Difficulties rather concern some Modern Divines than the Christian Religion, which they

they explain or defend not so well as they should. But because there is no Science without some Difficulties, however it be understood; it must be confest that there are some in the Christian Religion: of which I speak in this Chapter, where-with I shall conclude this Work. First I'll make some general Reflections upon the Difficulties which may occur in the Christian Theology; and then I'll alledg some particular Examples thereof, whereby I'll shew, that they ought not to make any Body doubt of its Truth.

There may be two sorts of Difficulties in a Science; some of which don't shake its Principles; but others shew it is no Science at all, tho so call'd, but a Collection and a heap of ill-grounded Opinions and Conjectures. For Example; There are indeed some Difficulties in *Geometry*, but no Body doubts of the truth of its Principles: The Reason of which is, because they are all grounded upon clear Proofs, and which can neither become obscure, nor doubtful. Whatever difficulty there may be, with respect to a Proposition following from those Principles, they don't change their Nature; and a Man is more apt to accuse himself of not understanding *Geometry* well, than to doubt of it, because he can't resolve a Difficulty: or else they shew that the Proposition in question is of such a nature as not to be
fully

fully resolv'd. On the contrary, there are some Difficulties rais'd against *Judiciary Astrology*, which not only perplex those who are fond of it, but also are the Cause why all its Principles are look'd upon as false, and all that pretended Science as a heap of Chimerical Thoughts. The reason of that Difference is, because the Principles of *Geometry* are either meer *Definitions*, or *Maxims* clear of themselves, or demonstrated *Propositions*: whereas *Judiciary Astrology* is only grounded upon false Suppositions. So that assoon as the Truths on which a Science is grounded, have been demonstrated, and there is no fault in those Demonstrations; whatever Difficulty there may be in any Proposition drawn from them, we don't look upon that Science to be less certain.

Now to apply that Observation to the Christian Religion, and to the Difficulties which Unbelievers find in it; The first thing to be done, when any Objection is rais'd against Christianity, is to see whether that Objection directly shews that the Proofs thereof are false. Tho nothing could be answer'd to that Difficulty, if those that raise it can't reply to the direct Proofs of Christianity, that Difficulty does not weaken the strength of the Proofs; and all that can be said is, that the Objection is about a Thing which we do not well understand, or that the Christian

stian Theology is not perfectly known to us. Wherefore the Incredulous act not wisely, when they reject the Christian Religion, because of some Difficulties, tho they are not able to confute the Proofs on which it is establish'd. Now I maintain that there is no Difficulty can destroy those Proofs; and if Unbelievers will mind it, they may observe that most of their Objections have no relation to them.

That Observation is of very great moment, when the Question is about some Facts, which happen'd many Centuries ago; and are attested by some Historians, whose Knowledg and Sincerity have been well prov'd. Altho one may raise some Difficulties, with respect to some Circumstances, which can't now easily resolv'd; yet if those Difficulties destroy not the direct Proofs we have of the sincerity of the Historians, and the exact knowledg they had of what they related, they ought not to make us doubt of the Truth of the History. To be able to answer all the Queries which may be made about a Relation, one should have been an Eye-witness of whatever it contains: and a History can't be look'd upon as fabulous, because no Body can satisfy us now about it, if we have no reason to suspect the Historians from whom we have it, of want of Honesty or Knowledg. I could easily clear this Matter with some Instances; but

but it would carry me too far.

To go on with the Comparifon I us'd, two forts of Objections may be rais'd againft fuch a Science as Geometry, and the Chriftian Theology. Some do only require the exact knowledg of two or three Propofitions, to be fully resolv'd; and fo they may be answer'd in few words. But others require a long Concatenation of many Propofitions, depending one upon another; fo that one can't be convinc'd of the laft, before he is fure of the Truth and Connexion of many others. In fuch a Cafe 'tis impoffible to fatisfy in few words, thofe to whom all thofe Propofitions, or the greateft part of them, are unknown; becaufe they ought to examine them one after another.

Notwithftanding, it has been obferv'd feveral times, that fome Men who have fome Difficulties about Religion, would have their Objections prefently resolv'd, without having any regard to what I faid; tho that Refolution neceffarily fupposes the knowledg of feveral other things, which they are ignorant of. Becaufe 'tis impoffible to fatisfy them without inftucting them in thofe things; and becaufe they grow prefently weary with a long Difcourfe, 'tis a difficult matter to make them fenfible of their Miftake. Tho it be their Fault, if they retire without being well pleas'd with thofe to whom
they

they propos'd their Objections, seeing they would not hear them; they fancy they have forc'd them to be silent, or to speak of something else. 'Tis just as if a Man, altogether ignorant of *Geometry*, should hear another speak of *Asymptot Lines*, or that approach nearer and nearer in *infinitum*, without ever touching one another, and would know, in two or three words, how that can be. No Mathematician could make him understand it in so short a time. If hereupon that Man should say, that there are very great Falsities in *Geometry*, and that that Science is not more certain than several others; what other Judgment could be made of him, but that he is the most unreasonable of all Men, seeing he would judg of a Thing, the Knowledg of which depends upon many more, without knowing them? The same may be said of those, who propose any difficulty about an Article of Religion, which can't be understood without the help of some others, and are angry because they are not answer'd in a word.

Some who want not Wit, and doubt of the Christian Religion, or reject it because they find some Difficulties in it, do most times make a most unreasonable supposition, without being sensible of it, *viz.* That whatever they do not distinctly comprehend, is not true; as if Human Knowledg ought necessarily to comprehend whatever

whatever exists, or is done in Nature. I could easily shew that there is an infinite number of things which our Knowledge can't attain to ; but it will suffice to observe here, that the Principle of the Unbelievers, which I mention'd just now, is a meer Supposition they are pleas'd to make, because they imagine it raises them above what they are. I maintain that this Proposition can't be denied, *viz. That there may really be some things, the Modus or Manner of which Humane Nature can't know at present, tho it studies for it never so much.* It ought to be observ'd that I do not say, there may be some things contrary to our distinct Notions, which is impossible ; but only that it may be, we have not the Knowledge that is requir'd, or the Means of acquiring it, to know some things ; which notwithstanding are not contrary to what we certainly know. 'Tis necessary to make that distinction, because several People, who are not aware of it, confound things that are extreamly different. We cannot believe what is really contrary to our clear Notions ; but we believe an infinite number of things, tho we know not how they come to pass.

Most Unbelievers are commonly guilty of another Fault, which is less excusable than the former. Instead of being in such a Disposition as is necessary for such as seek after Truth, they act like Men who only strive

strive to get the better, without inquiring who is in the Right or in the Wrong. They wrangle as much as they can, and if those with whom they dispute, do it unsuccessfully, they'll be sure to take advantage of it, as if the Truth of the Christian Religion depended upon that. They will not shew those, who do not defend Religion well, what Mistakes they are guilty of, but only labour to make advantage of it, that they may the more easily triumph over them.

But when the Question is concerning a thing of that nature, about which no Man can deceive others, without doing himself a greater prejudice: and when Truth is equally advantageous to every Body, Men should only labour to find it out, and instead of insulting those who can't shew the way to it, they should endeavour to put them in the right way. The Spirit of Dispute is altogether inconsistent with the search of Truth; and a Heathen Philosopher said well, † *That* † *Arist.lib.*
those who will rightly judg of Truth, ought *I.de Cælo,*
to be Arbitrators, not Parties. As soon as *c. 10.*
one has put on the Character of an Adversary, he thinks no more of Truth, but of the Glory which may be gotten by triumphing over him whom he has assaulted. He is only intent upon his Adversary's way of reasoning, to take him up upon all Occasions, but not to endeavour to
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find out a better: He considers no longer the thing in question, as the subject of his Enquiry, but of his Censure: He views it on every side, to find fault with it, not to know what it is grounded upon. 'Tis certain that this is an ill disposition of Mind, and Unbelievers themselves cannot deny it.

After what has been said, 'tis no wonder if Men, who shut their Eyes against the clear and beautiful part of the Christian Religion, and only open them to see what's obscure and difficult in it, that they may find fault with something or other, should at last grow so conceited of their pretended Sagacity, as to be almost incurable. Such a Disposition is not at all agreeable to the love of Truth, which they profess, and can only serve to increase one's Errors. And indeed what Truth can he find out, who only seeks an Occasion of disputing and overcoming? Truth, which often flies from those that seek it with Application, offers not it self to the sight of those that fly from it.

After those general Observations concerning the Difficulties that are offer'd against Religion, I must alledg some particular Examples of the chief Doctrines which Unbelievers are wont to assault. There is none they more frequently speak against, than what Christians believe concerning the Creation of the World; and
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it is of so great Moment, that it may be said this Doctrine being once well prov'd, 'tis no hard matter to get the rest admitted; whereas if it remains doubtful, the other Doctrines of Religion will necessarily be uncertain. All Revelation depends upon this, viz. *That there is a God, who created Heaven and Earth*: And he that begins not with that, can make no Progress in the Knowledge of Religion. So that it will be necessary to prove it in few words.

There are two sorts of Beings; some, call'd *Spirits*, Perceive, Will, Feel, and Reason; the other, who have no Understanding, are Extended, Divisible, and Solid, and are call'd *Bodies*. Those *Spirits* and *Bodies* are variously modifi'd, as we see or know by Experience. This is all that we know in the World, besides God. The Christian Religion teaches us that those *Spirits* and *Bodies*, with all their Properties, had a Beginning, and that they were created by a Being, who has no Beginning. This is what Unbelievers say they cannot apprehend, and it seems to them that every thing was always as it is now.

To know whether there is any appearance of Truth in what they say, we must examin those two sorts of Beings, and see whether they contain any thing, whereby we may suspect that they are Eternal.

As to Spirits, we only know our own Souls well, and Unbelievers acknowledg no other. Now I ask of them whether they perceive any thing in their Minds, which induces them to suspect that they are Eternal? 'Tis certain that there is no such thing, unless they will say that Ignorance and Weakness are Characters of Eternity. If we examin Bodies, which are inferior to Spirits, because they are without Understanding, we shall see nothing in them neither, which may make one believe that they are Eternal.

There are but two things that can be consider'd in this latter kind of Beings, *viz.* Matter and Form; and if neither of them affords us any reason to believe that they have always been, we cannot affirm it. As for the Matter of Bodies, 'tis but a Substance Extended, Solid, Divisible, and capable of Motion, and all sorts of Figures. That collection of Qualities, which makes up the Essence of all Bodies, as far as it is known to us, contains nothing that looks like Eternity. The notion of this Property, however it be consider'd, cannot be found in that Collection. So that it cannot be affirm'd that the Matter of Bodies is Eternal.

All that can be said thereupon may be reduc'd to these two things. First, That one cannot conceive how meer *Extension* had a Beginning; because notwithstanding
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all our endeavours to think upon the Time when God was alone, before Bodies were created, a simple and boundless Extension always offers it self to the Mind. But a meer Extension, in which we apprehend no Solidity, is not a Body; as it appears by the abovemention'd Definition of a Body. There is another manifest Proof of it, *viz.* because meer Extension is Indivisible and Boundless, as we perceive it by trying to divide or put some bounds to it in our Mind; whereas all Bodies are Divisible, and continu'd within Bounds. So that all that could be concluded from thence, is, that the Place of Bodies is Eternal.

Secondly, Unbelievers say that they cannot apprehend how such a Substance as that of Bodies should be *produc'd out of Nothing*, as the Christians say. If *to be created out of Nothing*, signifi'd to have no preexistent Cause, and yet to begin to exist, I confess that would be altogether impossible. For supposing that nothing exists but a meer Extension, how can it be conceiv'd that a solid and divisible Substance should be form'd in it? One might as well apprehend that all sorts of Beasts, Plants and Minerals may spring forth out of the Air, without any Productive Cause. But *to be created out of Nothing*, signifies to have a Cause, which contains in a more excellent manner the Proprieties which we

see in the things created, besides an infinite number of others ; from which Cause the things created have their Existence, or by the Will whereof they begin actually to exist. There is nothing in all this that's contradictory ; and if we do not clearly apprehend wherein the Action of the Cause, which creates out of nothing, consists, 'tis because the Nature of that Cause is not perfectly known to us.

To explain what I have said by an undeniable Example, no Man will deny that there is in Nature a Principle of Motion different from Matter, seeing we perceive that Matter moves not of it self. All that we perceive in it, is *Mobility*, but it cannot be said that we have any reason to believe that Matter moves and modifies it self. This being so, the immaterial Principle of Motion, whatever it be, *produces* Motion in Matter *out of nothing* ; that is to say, being able to move, without having the imperfections of Actual Motion, he makes Motion to begin to exist in Matter, which before was in the state of Rest. This is a Fact which cannot be doubted of, seeing Motion exists, and Matter is not the Cause of it. But 'tis not known how a Being incapable of Motion, seeing it is not Material, can produce it in Matter. If any one should say that Motion is Eternal, because he can't apprehend how it can have a Beginning ; he might be referred

ferr'd to Experience, which teaches us that we move our Arms and Feet when we please, after they have been at rest, tho we don't know how it is done. I know some Philosophers say, that we only determin the Actual Motion of the Animal Spirits, which move our Members as many ways as we please. I will not here confute that Conjecture, (for 'tis only a meer Conjecture) but I maintain that 'tis as difficult a thing to apprehend that an immaterial Being determines a Motion a certain way, as to apprehend that he produces it anew. So that if those Philosophers may be allow'd to affirm the one; or if they cannot deny it, tho they apprehend not how it comes to pass; it would be a great piece of Injustice to find fault with those that say there is an immaterial Principle which produc'd Motion in Matter, tho it is not known how he did it.

This being undeniable, I conclude from it, that tho I have no distinct Idea of the Manner after which God may have produc'd Bodies out of nothing, yet I can't deny it: especially if we observe in Matter no Character of Eternity, 'tis an absurd thing even to suspect that it is Eternal; and much more absurd still to find fault with Christian Divines, who say that it was created out of Nothing.

The nothing can hinder us from grounding the Creation of the World up-

on that Foundation ; yet it must be confest that the Christian Religion, which was instituted for illiterate Men, as well as for Scholars, do's not necessarily suppose these sorts of things, which require a greater Meditation than the Vulgar is capable of. It's enough to apprehend that God imparted to Matter the Form it now has, to pay to him all the Duties which he requires from us in the Gospel. So that, without supposing what I have prov'd concerning the Creation of the Matter of Bodies, we must inquire whether there is any Reason to believe that the Form they have is Eternal.

There is nothing in the Form no more than in Matter, which can make us suspect, that the World, as it is now, never had a Beginning. Tho we have not seen the Formation of the great Bodies that surround us, and not one Eye-witness has left a Relation of it ; tho it seems that little or no sensible Alteration happens in the World in general ; yet no Body can say for all that, that it has been the same from all Eternity ; because the World might have been fram'd before there was any Man upon the Earth.

But besides, we cannot say that the Form of the World is Eternal, and consequently that Men, and other Animals (which make a part of it) have always been upon Earth ; the perpetual Succession, which

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we see in their Kinds, do's plainly teach us, that they had a Beginning. It can't be said that the Animals who live at present, are born of their Fathers and Mothers, and These after the same manner, and so in *infinitum*, so as never to come to the first. The Reason of it is, because Beings that have a limited Duration, as that of every Generation is, cannot equal Eternity by such a Duration: as a number of limited Measures, tho never so great, cannot be equal to an infinite Extension. Every Generation singly taken having had a Beginning, we must necessarily come to the Beginning of those Generations.

'Tis therefore manifest, that Men and Beasts began to exist upon Earth, and consequently that they were form'd by some Cause. *Epicurus*, who said that they were form'd by a fortuitous Concourse of Atoms, made more ridiculous Suppositions, and more absurd Conjectures, than what we find in the antient Fables. Hence it is that no body maintains his *Hypothesis* now. But others say, that whatever exists, is properly but one Being, that modified it self by a necessary Consequence from its Nature. If any body knew what they mean, or if they knew it themselves, they might be confuted; but an Opinion that is so absurd and nonsensical, tho it has the outward Appearance of a Geometrical Order, can deceive no body but those

Not forming objects & acquiescent
(for it's indeterminate elements & things etc)
to my mind, at least.

those who will be deceiv'd, and are inclin'd to it from some other Reasons.

Wherefore seeing nothing can give a Beginning to it self, it must be confess'd that there is a Being more excellent than all Animals, who form'd them upon this Earth; and this is that Being which Christians call GOD: Thus they must of necessity acknowledg a God who has created us.

'Tis an easy thing to prove that he created the Sun and the Planets; because limited Periods, as those of the Planets are, can never exhaust Eternity, tho they be never so much multipli'd. So that we may very well say, *that there is a Maker of Heaven and Earth*; and no Objection can force us to renounce that Proposition, seeing we directly prove it by undeniable Arguments; and the Objections that may be oppos'd to them do not destroy them, and are but the natural Effects of our Ignorance.

They object, for example, That they cannot apprehend how God, who is suppos'd to be immaterial, could create Bodies out of nothing. *None can give what he has not*, say they; so that God being incorporeal, could not give to Bodies the Proprieties which they have. But it ought to be observ'd, that this very Argument will prove that there is no Motion in Nature; for one may say, Matter has no Motion

Morgan:

don't see it.

Motion of it self; and that which is immaterial has less still: None can give what he has not; wherefore Matter has no Motion. Let them try to answer this Argument, and the Answer, if it be good, will resolve the propos'd Objection against the Creation of Matter. It may be said, that God contains the real Proprieties of all Beings, but without having the Imperfections and Defects of them, seeing 'tis certain he has created them, and he is infinitely more perfect than all the Things to which he gave a Beginning. By this Argument we ascend from the Effects to the Cause, but we don't learn by it, nor by any other Argument, how the real Proprieties of Creatures are in God, nor how he made them to exist. The Fact is as certain as the Manner of it is above human Understanding, as well as the Origin of Motion, tho' no body can doubt of its Existence.

There is another thing which the Incredulous will not believe, viz. the Revelation which we say is contain'd in the *Old and New Testament*. Whatever they say concerning Revelation in general, is grounded upon this Prejudice, viz. that they themselves having no Experience of a Revelation, they can't be perswaded that there has been any. But nothing can be weaker than Arguments grounded only upon our Ignorance, and which suppose
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that what we know not is not true, as I have already observ'd. Those who deny Revelation, should either manifestly prove that God cannot reveal himself to his Creatures after an extraordinary manner, which no body will ever be able to prove, or find out in that Revelation some manifest Characters of Falsity, which no body can shew in the Revelation of Holy Scripture.

This might be sufficient to stop the Mouths of Unbelievers; but their Repugnancy to believe the Christian Religion arising partly from their being ignorant of the History thereof, and not perceiving how the Wisdom of God appears in it, I shall set down that History in a few Words.

Men knowing nothing but by Experience and Reflection; and Experience being slow, and Reflection often-times difficult, God shew'd them by some Revelations, from the Beginning of the World, what they ought to know concerning his Nature, and the Worship he requir'd from them. Tho *Moses* has given us but a short Abridgment of the History of what past during above two thousand Years, before he receiv'd the Law of God; yet he mentions † several Revelations, and every where supposes that they were very frequent, as all those who have read the Book of *Genesis* know very well. But it appears

† Gen. 3.
3. 9, &c.
& 6. 13.
& 7. 1. &
8. 15. &
9. 1. & 12.
1, &c.

appears that Men made not a very good Use of them. The *Egyptians*, one of the most antient and happy Nations in the World, were already in his time infected with a shameful Idolatry, * which made them worship Beasts. The *Cananeans* were also Idolaters, as he says † in many Places, and liv'd a very wicked Life. There is no likelihood that the other neighbouring Nations made a better Use of those antient Revelations, or the Light of Reason, which God has given to all Men.

* See Ex-
od. 8. 16.
& 32. 4.
† Lev. 20.
2. Numb.
25. 3, &c.

So that there was not one Nation that could boast to have improv'd the Talents it receiv'd from Heaven, as it ought to do; and if God had given them up to their Darkness and Wickedness, none of them could have justly complain'd of him. Notwithstanding, to pass by the Nations whose History is not well known to us, God being mov'd with Compassion towards Men, would not permit that Idolatry and corrupt Manners should, as it were, overflow the whole World. He continu'd to reveal himself more particularly to the Family of *Abraham* and his Posterity; and to make those Revelations more useful, and hinder them from being corrupted by the Mixture of the false Opinions of other Nations, he order'd the Israelites to frame a Commonwealth by it self, and forbad them to converse much with

with their Neighbours. To frame that Commonwealth, and enable it to maintain it self till he should think fit to call the other Nations to the same Knowledge the Hebrews had, he gave them some Laws, the Observation whereof he requir'd under most severe Penalties. There are several things to be observ'd in those Laws, which may help us to see the Wisdom contain'd in them; but it will suffice to say that some of them are grounded upon the very Constitution of Nature and humane Society; so that all Nations are bound to observe them, at least in some measure, and that they cannot be violated without hurting the Society. They are call'd *Moral Laws*. The other do so concern the Commonwealth of the Hebrews in particular, that other Men are not the worse for not observing them; and they are call'd *Political Laws*. Lastly, the other concern the Ceremonies which God would have to be observ'd in his Worship. They are stil'd *Ceremonial Laws*.

The first sort of Laws, as those which command to acknowledg a God, and to worship him, to honour our Parents, and to do to our Neighbour as we would be done by; that sort of Laws, I say, was approv'd by the wisest Heathen Legislators and Philosophers; and Jesus Christ has since confirm'd them. The necessity of those Laws can't be doubted of, seeing they

they can't be neglected without feeling the dismal Effects of that Neglect; and seeing the Nature of humane Society necessarily requires the Observation of those Laws, it can't be doubted but that they are worthy of him to whom humane Nature owes its Origin. Tho this is manifest, it would be an easy thing to shew that several Nations had many Laws contrary to them, because the Interests and Passions of some private Men prevail'd above the publick Good. Lest therefore the Light that was contrary to those ill Customs should be wholly extinguish'd among Men, it was necessary that there should be at least one Nation upon Earth, in which good and sound Laws should be so clearly and undeniably establish'd, that no body could doubt of them. This we find among the Jews: God himself deliver'd part of those Laws with his own Mouth, and acquainted them with the rest by a Prophet whom he authoriz'd with Miracles.

Those Laws are, as I said, equally necessary at all times, and in all places, in order to the Peace and Happiness of humane Society: but because it was necessary that the Commonwealth of the Jews should not be mix'd with other Nations, lest those Laws should be destroy'd, God gave them some other Laws accommodated to the *Genius* of that People, and to their

their State in the Land of *Canaan*, which they were to possess. Such are the Political and Ceremonial Laws; the chief Excellency of which consists in having nothing that is contrary to the Moral Laws, and in being suited to the People who receiv'd them. One may easily perceive that the Political and Ceremonial Laws of *Moses* contain nothing that's contrary to the Moral ones: but to convince ones self that God could give no Laws more suitable to the State and *Genius* of the Jews, one ought to have a competent Knowledge of the Manners of the Nations among which they had liv'd, and with which they were then surrounded. Those who have appli'd themselves to that Study, have found out that a great part of those Laws were like those of the neighbouring Nations, and that they were also || contrary to them in several things; so that it may be said that God, accommodating himself to the *Genius* of the Israelites, took care so to distinguish the Form of their Commonwealth and Worship, from that of their Neighbours, that it was impossible they should mix themselves with them, as long as they should observe those Laws. I will not come to the Particulars of those Facts, because I have treated of them at large in the Latin Book which I just now quoted in the Margin.

|| See my
Commen-
tary upon
the Penta-
teuch.

As God had settl'd those Laws chiefly by his Authority, or that of a Prophet authoriz'd with Miracles, so he still requir'd the Observation of them, not only by the ordinary Magistrates who might themselves neglect them in time, but also by several Prophets whom he sent to the Jews from time to time to censure them for their Vices, and excite them to obey him by some Rewards and Punishments, which they preach'd in his Name.

All the Laws that have relation to a certain State of a Nation, which makes them useful and necessary, do evidently suppose that they are only good, as long as that State lasts; and such were the Political and Ceremonial Laws of the Jews. Notwithstanding the Law-giver, who would give no body an occasion of breaking his Laws, on pretence that they were no longer necessary, and so of overthrowing the Commonwealth of the Jews before the time, speaks every-where of them as of *eternal* Laws. He kept to himself the Power of abrogating them when the time should come, lest the Jews should do it unseasonably, and after a manner contrary to his Intention.

In the mean time the Prophets whom he sent to keep the Jews to their Duty, or to bring them to it, were order'd to say many things, which by degrees dispos'd that People to what was to happen some time

or other, that is, to see themselves mix'd with all the other Nations, and to observe only such Laws as are of an eternal Use, and grounded on the Constitution of humane Nature. For example, *Jeremiah* was commanded to say to the Jews of his time; * *The Days come, saith the † Creator, that I will make a new Covenant with the House of Israel, and with the House of Judah: not according to the Covenant which I made with their Fathers in the day that I took them by the Hand to bring them out of the Land of Egypt—But this shall be the Covenant that I will make with the House of Israel, After those Days I will put my Law in their inward Parts, and write it in their Hearts; (that is, it will be of such a Nature that Reason only will almost teach it, and they will easily remember it) and I will be their God, and they shall be my People: And they shall teach no more every Man his Neighbour, and every Man his Brother, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, &c.* This clearly denotes some new Laws, which one might easily learn and remember; whereas it was not so with the Ceremonial Laws of *Moses*, which can neither be easily remembr'd nor understood. Another Prophet introduces God speaking thus;

|| *From the rising of the Sun even unto the going down of the same, my Name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every Place In-*
cense

* Ch. 31.
31, &c.
† So the
word Je-
hovah may
be render'd.
See my Re-
marks upon
Exod. 6.3.

|| Mal. I. II.

cense shall be offer'd unto my Name, and a pure Offering; for my Name shall be great among the Heavens.

There are also some Promises in the Prophets concerning him whom God was to send to instruct the Jews more clearly in his last Intention, as in the 53d Chapter of *Isaiah*, wherein God says, amongst other things; *By his Knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many, and he shall bear their Iniquities.* Elsewhere he is represented as a King: * *Thou Bethlehem Ephratah, tho thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel.*

* Mich. 5.
2.
See Zech.
9. 9.

Tho it is no easy thing to prove now to the Jews or others, by some grammatical Arguments, that those Passages, and the like, concern the Deliverer who was promis'd to the Israelites; yet it appears by the History of the Gospel, and their most antient Teachers, that the Jews understood then the Prophecies in that Sense. It was a general Opinion that a King was to come, (whom they named *Messiah* by Excellency, that is to say *Anointed*, because Kings were anointed) and that he wou'd change the State of the Commonwealth of *Israel*. But neither the Words of the Prophets, nor what Tradition might have preserv'd of their Doctrine, were clear enough to give them a distinct and true Notion of the Person of that

King, or the Nature of his Kingdom. Hence it is that they expected a King like those whom they had formerly, who should subdue their Neighbours to their Empire.

There are many such Promises in the Prophets which I will not insist upon, because some few Examples will be sufficient to shew the Design of the Revelation, and the Effect it wrought in the Minds of the People. The Jews having had some Prophets when they return'd from the Captivity of *Babylon*, had none since, at least that we know of, to the time of the Empire of *Augustus*, which was the time appointed by the Divine Wisdom, to send not only to the Jews, but to all Mankind, a new Law-giver, to instruct them more fully in the Knowledge of their Duty.

I must somewhat insist upon this Place, to shew God's Wisdom in the Choice of the Time wherein he sent Christ to the World. The Jews stood no more in need of such Prophets as the foregoing were, to require from them the Observation of the Law of *Moses*, and censure their Vices. The Writings of the antient Prophets, which they read then more carefully than ever they did, were sufficient for that. There was no need neither to make further Promises of a Messiah by new Revelations; they thought they perceiv'd him clearly enough in the Old. But they stood
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in great need of two things. The one was to learn that the true Worship of God do's not consist in Ceremonies, but in entertaining noble Thoughts of God, and in praying to, and trusting in him, and in loving one's Neighbour as himself. It ought to be observ'd that by the word *Neighbour* we must understand all Men in general. The other thing the Jews wanted then, was to know certainly that there is a future Life, and that God will reward good Men, and punish the Wicked after this Life.

The Jews entertain'd a most pernicious Error concerning the first thing, *viz.* that the Observation of the Ceremonies was the chief thing Men could do to be acceptable to God, whereas those Ceremonies were but some Laws which God had giv'n them out of Condescension, and to keep them separate from other Nations, until a certain time; as it appears from the thing it self, and Experience. Besides, the Romans being then ready to deprive them of a small Remainder of Liberty which they enjoy'd, and to take from them the Means of preserving their Temple, it was very necessary that the Jews should know that it was no great Loss, seeing they would be no less acceptable to God, by worshipping him only, and obeying his Moral Laws, tho they should observe no longer the Ceremonial ones. Forasmuch as they

were to be mix'd for ever with all Nations, their Commonwealth being destroy'd without any hope of a Re-establishment; one of the most useful Advices that could be giv'n them, was to look upon all Men as their *Neighbours*. They were forbidden before to converse familiarly with them, as long as the Commonwealth of *Israel* should subsist; but after its total Destruction there was no room left for that Distinction; nay, it was impossible. The Re-union of the Jews with the rest of Mankind was most worthy of God, the common Father of all Men, who had separated his Children for a time, lest a general Corruption should overflow them.

As for what concerns a future Life, together with its Rewards and Punishments, it was altogether necessary that Christ should ground that Belief upon a new Foundation. The Prophets spoke not clearly enough upon that Point, and it can't be found in their Writings but by the help of several Consequences, and those sometimes extremely nice. That Doctrine is not expressly treated of therein, and there is nothing concerning it where any would think it should be handled at large, and in express Words, as in that Part of the Law wherein Rewards are promis'd to those who shall obey God, and Punishments denounc'd against those who shall break his Commandments.

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Hence it is that the *Sadduces* laugh'd at that Doctrine, and pretended it was a vain Tradition. Yet 'tis certain that Religion runs a great Danger without this Doctrine, which is undoubtedly always necessary to excite Men to the Practice of Vertue, as I could easily shew; but it was especially necessary to the Jews at that time. The Persecutions of their Neighbours, or their own Dissensions, had reduc'd them to a miserable Condition, and the temporal Promises of the Law were no more fulfill'd. Which made even good Men murmur, and the learn'd Men of that time were not at all able to hinder it, as it appears from the Authors of the *Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus*, who are strangely perplex'd with this Question, * *Why wicked Men are often very happy in this Life, and those that keep the Law very miserable?* That Question could not be otherways answer'd, than by saying, that God being not willing that the Commonwealth of *Israel* should last longer, ceas'd to grant to the Observers of his Laws the Rewards he had promis'd them; and that calling them now to a more sublime Vertue, he would grant them in another Life an infinitely more excellent Reward than the temporal Happiness they wish'd for.

* See *Wisdom, ch. 4, & 5, &c.*

'Tis true that the Pharisees asserted the Resurrection of the Dead, and an eternal Life, but it seems they grounded their Be-

lief more upon Tradition than the express Words of Scripture. Nay, they spake of another Life as the Heathens did,
 * Anr. Jud. if we believe * *Josephus*. To build so important a Doctrine upon a solid Foundation, nothing less could be requir'd than the Authority of the Messiah, who very clearly teaches it every-where, and was himself a sensible Example of what God will do for good Men: which made one of his Apostles say, † *that he has brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel.*

† 2 Tim.
 1. 10.

It appears from what has been said, how necessary it was that Christ should be born among the Jews at that very time, and how necessary and useful his Doctrine was to them. But perhaps it will be ask'd, why there was no Reason then to fear the Jews would corrupt themselves among the Pagans, as they did formerly? The Reason of it is, because the Belief of the Unity of a God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and his Spirituality, were so rooted in the Minds of the Jews, that nothing could perswade them to the contrary hereafter. The Jews were better qualify'd, and more like to convert the Heathens, than the Heathens to draw the Jews to their Opinions, tho they had the uppermost. The most celebrated Philosophers among the *Grecians* believ'd the Unity of a supreme God; and the Religion

gion of the *Mob*, which was built upon Fables, was not at all approv'd by Men of Sense, as may be easily prov'd. So that the Jews ran not so great a danger, in that respect, as they did before. Besides, it was none of the *Romans* Maxims to make Profelytes, as the Jews did; so that they endeavour'd not, at least commonly, to make them embrace their Opinions, either by cunning Arts, or by Force. They tolerated them every-where, provided they would obey the Laws which were not repugnant to their Religion.

Besides, God, who was making every thing ready to call the Gentiles to his Knowledg, was shortly to form a great People in the midst of Paganism, with whom the Jews might live without any danger of corrupting themselves. But it will be ask'd, Why God staid so long before he manifested himself to the Heathens? Perhaps what I said just now, is one Reason of it, *viz.* lest the Jews being oblig'd to live amongst them, should altogether corrupt themselves, if Heathenism should prevail every-where. But besides, it may be said that the *Romans* and *Grecians* were never better qualific'd to receive the Gospel. The Study of Philosophy had in some measure deliver'd them from the Ignorance and Superstition they lay under during many Ages; and the Grandeur of the *Romans*, who were not very well

well perswaded of the Truth of their Ancestors Religion, did not allow them to mind whatever might be said against their Gods. The Jews and Christians have not more rail'd at them than the Epicureans, as it appears by the Example of *Lucian*. Tho the Discourses of the Epicureans arose from a Principle of Atheism, altogether contrary to the Disposition of the Jews and Christians, yet they contributed much to facilitate the Belief of the Christian Religion, because the Epicureans knew very well how to destroy the Pagan Religion, but had no better Principles to establish in its stead; whereas the Jews and Christians had a very rational System to supply the room of the Heathenish Errors. Thus God, who can draw Light out of Darkness, made use of the Effect the Epicurean Philosophy had wrought, to introduce his Knowledg more easily among the Heathens.

The most civiliz'd and frequented Parts of *Europe* and *Asia* being at that time under one and the same Empire, and under some Laws that were just enough; the Peace which was then more general than it had been before, and the Safety wherewith Men might travel thro' the Roman Empire, did very much contribute to the Propagation of the Christian Doctrine; so that it may be said, that if God design'd to have Compassion on the Heathens, th

it was then the time, or never, to call them to his Knowledg.

During those Circumstances, which I desire the Reader to recal to his Mind, God was pleas'd that a Law-giver should be born among the Jews, of another Nature than he whom they expected, and infinitely more useful to them. Instead of a temporal King, who might have increas'd their Power and Renown, but would not have lessen'd their Ignorance nor their Vices ; God sent them a King worthy of him who taught them how they ought to live here, to be eternally happy after this Life ; and shew'd them, that instead of being Members of a little Commonwealth, and Enemies to the rest of Mankind, they ought to look upon the whole World as their native Countrey, and all Men as their Fellow-Citizens ; a Thought worthy of those who already profess'd to believe that all Men are equally the Work of God.

As for those Pagans who were not content with their own Religion, they made use in vain of the Light of their Philosophers, to find out something better, when Christianity happily offer'd it self to them, to free them from their Doubts. There was a general Corruption among them, proceeding from some having no Religion, and others ridiculous ones. 'Tis true that the Philosophers oppos'd that Corruption
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in some measure: but some of them exhorted Men to Vertue only as much as it was necessary for them in this Life, as the *Epicureans* which took off all the Force of their Discourses; others, as the *Platonicks* and *Stoicks*, mention'd indeed the Rewards, which may be expected after Death, but only in a doubtful manner, and without any Proof; so that their Exhortations were in effect very weak. Their Morals were fine indeed, yet there were several things in them to be found fault with, and their Theology was full of *Chimeras*, which now I will not insist upon. Then the Christian Religion appear'd with a Theology altogether agreeable to the Light of Reason, with so perfect a System of Morals, that it contains whatever the several Sects of Philosophers said, that was good, upon that Matter; and with Rewards and Punishments so certain, that Men are necessarily mov'd with them when they think of them. It must be confess'd that God could reveal nothing to Men that was more suitable to their needs, nor enlighten them in a more proper time.

It appears from thence that God had very good Reasons to manifest himself to the Jews and Heathens, as I have said. Not that I will affirm that those are precisely the Reasons of the Conduct of Providence, and that it had no other. My
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Design was only to make it appear that 'tis a very easy thing to shew the Wisdom thereof, and to stop the Mouths of Unbelievers; for if Men, notwithstanding their Ignorance, can give very probable Reasons of God's Conduct, how great a Light might he dart into our Minds, if he were pleas'd to draw off the Vail, if I may speak so, under which he hides himself?

I must make some more Observations upon the Persons whom he made use of to manifest himself to Men, because Unbelievers fancy that they should have been quite other Men than they were. They think that if God design'd to send any in his Name to Men, he should have chosen Men of Authority, to keep them in awe; and eloquent enough to excite the Attention of others, and write according to all the Rules of Eloquence what they design'd to leave to Posterity.

I confess that most of those whose Ministry God made use of to reveal his Will to Men, were not at all Persons of Authority. The Gospel it self, which is his last Revelation, was preach'd only by mean and ordinary Men, without any Dignity in the Commonwealth of the Jews. But I maintain that there are sensible Marks of God's Wisdom in that Choice, which could not appear in a contrary Choice. I will only speak of the first Preachers of the Gospel, because what I shall say of them
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may be easily appli'd to the Prophets of the Old Testament, who were Men of the same Condition.

Tho Christ was born of a Royal Line, his Family was become so poor, that he could make no great Figure among the Jews upon the score of his Extraction. Most of his Apostles were Fishermen, or Men of no greater Account: So that they had no Authority among their Countrymen whereby they might command any Respect. But that which seem'd proper to expose them to Contempt was the only thing that could authorize their Doctrine, especially in future Ages. To be convinc'd of it, let us suppose the contrary a little, and see what would be thought of it. If Christ and his Apostles had been Men of Authority, it might be said, with great shew of Reason, First, that they were Men of great Parts, who seeing the Jews in such a Corruption, which altogether destroy'd the Civil Society amongst them, as we learn from the History of that time, undertook to reform them, by feigning new Revelations, and authorizing these pretended Revelations by false Miracles. 'Tis a Design that Men of the first Rank may easily think of, and several have been accus'd of it, as *Lycurgus*, *Numa* *, and other Pagan Law-givers, who feign'd to have receiv'd their Laws from some Deity, to make them more sacred.

* See Plutarch in their Lives: Diodorus Siculus, Bibl. lib. 1. towards the end. Lactantius Inst. Div. lib. 1. c. 22.

cred. Secondly, it might be said, that by giving better Laws to their Fellow-Citizens, as being come from Heaven, they not only did them good Service in deceiving them, but also that they themselves got Credit by it, because they were look'd upon as Ministers of the Godhead. Thirdly, it would be said that their Miracles were false, because Men of Authority and Power may easily deceive others, by appointing some Men who favour their Design, and frightening by their Authority those who could discover their Cheats. 'Twas, for example, an easy thing for *Numa Pompilius* to pretend that he had a particular Acquaintance with the Nymph *Egeria*, and perswade the Romans that he went to see that Goddess every Night in a Wood, wherein he might easily hide some body who made them believe, by a thousand Cheats which may easily come into one's Mind, that this Wood was the Residence of the Goddess. He might reward those who favour'd his Design, and revenge himself of those who should endeavour to cross it. So that it must be confess'd that Men of Authority preaching a new Revelation, might have been so much suspected by their Contemporaries, and especially by Posterity, that it would have been a very difficult thing, to assure one's self of their Sincerity.

On the contrary, 'tis manifest, that such a Design of reforming the Jewish Nation, and even all Mankind, by feigning a false Revelation, could not easily come into the Mind of Men who had no Authority. So vast a Project is not for ordinary Men, who seldom entertain great Thoughts; and the Danger of being discover'd and punish'd by the Magistrates is more than sufficient to deter them from doing it, if they had any such Thoughts. They would be so far from hoping with any probability to get more Credit and Authority by such a Cheat, that they would be afraid of being discover'd by their Superiours, who always suspect such Designs. Lastly, Such Men can promise no Rewards to those who assist them, nor threaten those that cross their Designs of revenging themselves upon them. Their Superiours watch over their Actions, and won't allow them to meddle with any thing that is out of their Sphere, and will be sure to punish them upon the first Motion they make. 'Tis therefore much more likely that Men of no Authority may act sincerely on such an occasion, than those of the first Rank. But there was nothing more necessary for all future Ages than to chuse for the Preaching of the Gospel, Men whose Honesty could not be suspected, seeing 'tis only upon their Sincerity that all our Belief is grounded.

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And besides, the Success of the Preaching of the Gospel by Men of no Authority, is a plain Evidence of the Finger of God, and the Strength of the Apostles Arguments; whereas the Success of a Design contriv'd and put in execution by considerable Men, would be look'd upon as an Effect of their Authority, rather than of their Reasons. * *God has chosen, says one* * 1 Cor. 1. of Christ's Apostles, *the foolish things of the World to confound the Wise: and God has chosen the weak things of the World to confound the things which are mighty: and base things of the World, and things which are despis'd has God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no Flesh should glory in his Presence.* 27, &c.

I come now to the Art and Eloquence which Unbelievers would require in the Writings of the Apostles, to believe that they are inspir'd: but I affirm again, that that very thing would raise Suspensions against them, and Doubts concerning the Truth of their Doctrine. Before I shew it, I must not forget to say, that I don't blame Art and Eloquence as being pernicious and useless on all occasions. On the contrary, those that make a good use of it, can't be too much esteem'd, that is, those who use it to vindicate and clear Truth, or to lead Men to Vertue. I only design to shew that it fell out better that

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the first Preachers of the Gospel were destitute of it.

Let us suppose again the contrary of what happen'd ; and that the Apostles who left to Posterity the Life, Discourses and Doctrine of Jesus Christ, were Men of great Eloquence, and perfect Masters of the Art of Writing exactly and methodically. Let us suppose that their Writings as well as their Discourses were compos'd with great Exactness, and all possible Elegancy ; I'll tell you the Effect it would work upon the Minds of Men, especially of those who should read them now. They would think that they were very ingenious Men, whose Learning and Eloquence had mov'd them to propagate their Doctrine through the whole World, and get Reputation by it ; as it can't be doubted that 'twas *Plato's* Design as well as of many other Philosophers. It would be said that those Men, in order to convince others not only of the Excellency of their Morals, by the Eloquence of their Writings, but also to make them observe so excellent a Doctrine, out of a more powerful Motive, contriv'd all the Miracles contain'd in the Life of Christ. The more exact they had been in observing the Circumstances of Time, Places, and Persons ; the more careful they had been to set off the wonderful Parts of that incomparable Life, and the Beauty of their Master's

Master's Thoughts, by their manner of expressing them, the more they would have been suspected of Artifice, especially in the following Ages, when what they said of Christ would be the only Reason of believing in him. Thus *Plato* * was suspected to have adorn'd the Discourses of *Socrates* his Master; nay it has been said, that he sent him some of his own Thoughts, as those who have any Knowledge of the Master and his Disciple can't doubt of it.

* Vid. Diogenes Laert. lib. 3. §. 3. & Intt. in h. loc.

The Success of the Gospel, which is no inconsiderable Mark of its Divinity, would be look'd upon as the Effect of the Eloquence of its first Preachers, not of an extraordinary Providence. It would have been said at most, that the Doctrine of the Apostles was the most excellent and rational Philosophy that had been taught till that time. But by granting the Truth of their moral Rules, they would have doubted of its Divinity, and look'd upon it rather as the effect of the Apostles Meditations, than a Divine Revelation.

But having written the Life of their Master, and publish'd his Discourses without any Art or Method, they can't be suspected neither to have contriv'd what they said, nor to have us'd any Artifice to make a Lie look with the Air of Truth. Their great Simplicity, which appears every where, and their taking no

* 1 Cor.
2. 4. 5.

care to impose upon the Reader, are evident Marks not only of their being not able to deceive, but also of their Sincerity. The wonderful Success of their Preaching, tho destitute of whatever rais'd the Admiration of the Orators and Philosophers, is a convincing Proof of their being favour'd by Heaven. * *My Speech and my Preaching, says one of them, was not with enticing Words of Mens Wisdom, but in Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power, (to wit, in the Miracles) that your Faith should not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God.*

If we reflect upon those Circumstances of the Revelation, and all the other, which at first seem to make one doubt of it, when they are not thoroughly examin'd, we shall see that God could not give more sensible Marks of the Care he took about it, but by chusing those whose Ministry he made use of to propagate it through the whole World.

I shall not undertake to resolve the particular Objections which Unbelievers may raise against the Christian Religion: the Answer to which must be look'd for in the Writings of those who have directly prov'd the Truth of it, or written upon the Holy Scripture.

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The CONCLUSION of the Second Part.

I Think I may conclude now (nor can Unbelievers accuse me of drawing a Consequence that extends farther than the Proofs I made use of) that nothing can be more false than to fancy that the Christian Religion is grounded upon mere Credulity: That the Ignorance or corrupt Manners of those who profess it, ought not to prejudice it in the least: That tho many profess it out of Interest for many Ages past, rather than out of Persuasion, no such thing can be suspected concerning its first Founders: That the Divisions which are among Christians ought not to make one doubt of the Truth of it: That the Gospel is very useful to the greatest part of Mankind, both in this Life and the next: That the Fallacies which are to be found in the Doctrine of some Christians now, must not be ascrib'd to the Apostles. Lastly, That the History of the Creation of the World, and of God's Revelation to Men, such as the Christians represent it, contains nothing but what is most agreeable to Reason, and most worthy of the Wisdom of the Maker of Heaven and Earth.

If Unbelievers would seriously think upon what I have said concerning those Propositions, I am perswaded that they would easily grant them; and then they might find, without any difficulty, an Answer to all their particular Objections. As soon as some undeniable Principles have been laid down, which influence all the Parts of the Christian Theology, several things, which before seem'd difficult, cease then to be so; and thus one's Knowledge may be encreas'd every day. On the contrary, the general Principles of Religion remaining uncertain or unknown, every thing makes Men perplex'd, and the longer they live in such a State, the more the Difficulties encrease. As soon as Men have learn'd to distinguish the Religion of Christ and his Apostles from what is taught in several Parts of *Europe*, and the Maxims of the first Founders of Christianity, from those of many Christians of this time; they may easily perceive that a great Part of the Doctrines which they were offended at, and the Behaviour which they dislike, are not at all like the Doctrine of antient Christianity, or the Manners of the Primitive Christians.

The thing we treat of is not a Dispute, wherein Men only design to shew their Wit, and get the Victory, but the Question is about the Search of a Truth, the Know-

Knowledg whereof is equally useful to both Sides: Unbelievers ought therefore to part altogether with that Spirit of Wrangling, which makes them so eager to find fault, as if they were sorry to be convinc'd that the Christian Religion contains nothing that clashes with right Reason. On the contrary, they should be dispos'd as those who search a Truth necessary to them, and think rather to discover it themselves, than to find some Falsities in the Doctrine of those who would lead them to it, and to whom it is not perhaps well known. If those to whom they make their Application to resolve their Doubts, do not satisfy them, they ought to apply themselves to the Divines, or read the Writings of another Party, which perhaps will afford them greater Satisfaction. Nay, if no body did altogether satisfy them, they would not be less bound to seek the Truth; and having known it in part, they should endeavour to go farther, if it were possible, and take care not to part with what seem'd to them certain, because they are not convinc'd of the rest.

This common Sense would require from Unbelievers, if Christianity was now in so deplorable a Condition, that of all the Sects whereof it is made up, none knew it in its whole Extent, or could defend it as they ought. But Thanks be to God

we are not reduc'd to that Extremity. The Method of Reasoning about Religion, as about all other things, and the manner of explaining the Holy Scripture, were brought in the last Century, and in this, by some Christians, to such a degree of Perfection, as they never attain'd to before. Those who liv'd in the first Ages of Christianity had reason to thank God for shewing them clear and living Proofs of the Truth of the Christian Religion by the Miracles that were wrought in the sight of all Men, and the exact Knowledg they had of the History of its first Founders. If we have not the same Advantages, we have at least reason to give him our Thanks for teaching us that tho the Christian Religion was founded without much Reasoning or Eloquence, for the Reasons I have alledg'd, yet the more we are able to reason well, the better we may be convinc'd of it; and that the Art of Writing according to the Rules grounded on Reason, may be of great Use to set all the Beauties of the Christian Religion in their due Light. The Suspicions which those Talents might have rais'd concerning its first Founders, have no room left with respect to those who write now. There can be no better Service done to Religion than by enquiring into its Proofs with all the Exactness that we are capable of, and setting before the
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Eyes of the Reader what has been discover'd, with all the Ornaments of true Eloquence. Those who know the History of past Ages, are not ignorant that in many of them false Reasonings and great Ignorance were the best Talents of the Interpreters of Religion; so that a Man who read them, was almost to part with Reason and common Sense. God be thank'd we are no more in such a Darkness! May he encrease more and more the Light we enjoy by his Grace!

FINIS.

Two

Two LETTERS concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion.

ADVERTISEMENT.

WHEN I began the foregoing Discourse, I thought it not necessary to add any direct Proofs of the Truth of the Christian Religion: But, as I went on, I perceiv'd that this Work would not be compleat enough, if I prov'd it not at least in few Words. What I have said concerning Incredulity, being design'd only to remove the general Obstacles which hinder the Incredulous from believing it to be true, it would seem that I was contented to make part of that Way smooth which may lead them to Heaven, without caring to guide them to the End of it. Therefore I thought my self oblig'd to add these two Letters, one of which was publish'd about ten Years ago, but it will be found here larger, more correct, and in a better Order than it was before. As for the other, 'tis almost but an Extract, by way of a Letter, of a Chapter of

a Latin Book, wherein I have treated of the Nature of Spirits, which was made publick above these three Years.

LETTER I.

Wherein is prov'd the Sincerity of the Apostles in the Testimony they bore to the Resurrection of Christ.

I. **S**IR, You desire that I prove to you in few Words the Truth of the Christian Religion, that you may use my Proofs to cure some Gentlemen of your Acquaintance, who are fall'n into Infidelity. I could refer you to others who have successfully treated of that Matter, but because most of them have enlarg'd very much upon it, I'll endeavour to tell you more briefly what I think proper to convince your Friends of the Truth of Christianity.

The most common Reproach Unbelievers cast upon us, is, that we are full of Prejudices, which hinder us from undeceiving our selves. We say the same thing of them, and we affirm that 'tis commonly their ill Disposition which raises some Difficulties in their Minds, which otherwise they would not so much

as think of. Besides, we upbraid them with supposing a thousand uncertain things in their Reasonings, as if they were certain; and they fail not in their turn to accuse us of the same Fault. 'Tis not just that either of us should suppose our Prejudices as Principles that are either demonstrated, or that want no Demonstration. Let us therefore act on both sides, as if we had embrac'd no Party, and let us say nothing but what is grounded upon some Principles granted on both sides.

'Tis granted on all hands, that there are certain Characters, whereby we may often know whether a Fact be true or not, and distinguish a false History from a true one. If this was not granted, Men must be *Scepticks*, or rather mad Men; for one can't, without being stark mad, doubt of the Truth of all Histories. But another thing must be also granted, which is not less certain, *viz.* that to know the Truth or Falsity of a Fact, several Circumstances of Things, Time, Places and Persons, must be present to the Mind, without which one can't judg solidly of that Fact, and by which one may most certainly determin whether it be true or false. Those who know those Circumstances, and have examin'd them at their leisure, may certainly give their Judgment about the Facts in question; but they can't convince others,

others, without having instructed them before, and convinc'd them of the same Circumstances : For example, those who have read the Roman History cannot doubt whether there was a *Julius Cesar*, who made himself Master of the Commonwealth, because the Multitude of contemporary Historians, and of the following Ages, who attest the same thing, the Series of the Time and History, Inscriptions, Medals, and the Air of Sincerity which is to be perceiv'd in all those things, do not allow them to doubt of it. But if a Man was ignorant of all these Reasons which we have to believe the Facts I have mention'd, and would doubt of them, it would be impossible to free him from his Doubt, without instructing him in all those Circumstances.

The Divinity of the Christian Religion being establish'd upon some Facts, one can't judg of it neither but by the Knowledge of the Circumstances which attend them. Wherefore those who desire it should be prov'd to them, without acquainting them with those Circumstances, require a thing equally unjust and impossible. What I have said concerning *Julius Cesar* can't be prov'd to a Man altogether ignorant of the Roman History, whilst he remains in that Ignorance, and consequently 'twould be unjust to require any such thing with respect to Religion.

3. The first thing therefore that ought to be done, to prove the Truth of the Christian Religion, is to set down the Facts it supposes, with all their Circumstances : but an Objection offers it self, which must be resolv'd before. They ask what are the Doctrines of that Religion, for the Christians have great Controversies among themselves about their Belief. But our business is not to prove the private Opinions of any Party of Christianity. 'Tis enough to shew, that the Doctrines about which all Christians agree are true, by proving the Truth of some Facts, about which they agree too. Those who are sure of the Truth of its Doctrines and Facts, may, if they will, afterwards examine all the Controversies they please.

* See an
Abridgment
of them in
ch. 1. of
Part 1.

Therefore without undertaking to decide those Matters, I begin with the Examination of the Gospel-Morals, * without coming to any Particulars. It can't be deni'd, that if all Men liv'd according to its Precepts, and by reason of the Rewards and Punishments of another Life were careful to worship the Creator of the World ; to live with Modesty, Temperance, Sobriety and Patience ; and to deal with their Neighbours as they would be dealt by them ; it can't be deni'd, I say, that such a Life would be most pleasant and advantageous to human Society. We should not see a thousand impious Extravagancies,

vagancies, and so many Superstitions, which have very dismal Consequences, as we see among Idolatrous Nations. The excessive Love of Dignities, Riches and Pleasures, would not be the Cause of any Disorder, and would be attended with no publick or private Sorrows. Men should not know what it was to wrong their Neighbours, or suffer any Trouble, because of others Inhumanity or Malice. They would help one another in all their Needs, with all the Ardour and Eagerness that can be wish'd for. If they should happen to give one another any Trouble, without any premeditated Design, they would forgive one another, and make amends for it by all sorts of good Services. Lastly, the Mind enjoying a perfect Tranquillity, and the Body being as healthful as its natural Weakness can allow, and both enjoying the harmless Pleasures which the Gospel allows us, Men would not part with so pleasant a Life, but to enjoy another that would be free for ever from the unavoidable Inconveniencies to which Nature has made those liable who live upon Earth.

Such as have any Notion of the Morals of Christ, will necessarily grant this Truth, *viz.* that Men would be most happy if they observ'd them all alike. It will perhaps be ask'd, whether any Christian Society does it? But that is not a pro-

proper Question; 'tis enough if it be granted that a Doctrine which can work so admirable Effects, must needs make one entertain favourable Thoughts of those who preach'd it at first. We can't forbear admiring those who first exhorted Men to live one with another after a manner so agreeable to Reason, so advantageous to Society, and so pleasant and charming, that nothing can be preferr'd to it but the supreme Happiness, which can't be enjoy'd but in an endless Life.

4. To know when that Doctrine was brought into the World, and by whom, we need only examin from Age to Age the Authors who spoke of it, by ascending from ours to that wherein Christianity began first to be known. We shall learn from thence, or from the reading of some History, that above thirteen hundred Years past the Roman Emperors having embrac'd the Christian Religion, it flourish'd in a great part of *Europe*, *Asia*, and *Africa*. We may be convinc'd by a great number of Christian Authors, that from that time they profess'd to believe the Divinity of the Gospel-Morals. If we go higher still, we shall find by the reading of Heathen and Christian Authors, that there was already a great multitude of Christians under those Emperors, who taught the same Doctrine. All those who spake of the Origin of Christianity grant it

it began under the Empire of *Tiberius*, and that it was not heard of before. *Tacitus* who was born towards the end of the Empire of *Claudius*, or in the beginning of *Nero's*, says that *Nero* having set on fire several Parts of *Rome*, charg'd the Christians with it, and put them to horrible Torments. He takes occasion from thence to speak of the Origin of Christianity in these Words: * *The Author of that Sect is* * Annal. lib. 15. c. 44. *Christ, who was put to Death under the Empire of Tiberius by Pontius Pilate, Governor of Judea. That pernicious Superstition, tho suppress'd in the beginning, quickly broke out again, and spread it self not only throughout Judea, the Place where this Evil had its Origin, but also in Rome, whither every villainous and shameful thing resorts, and finds Abettors. Those who confess'd that they were Christians, were presently seiz'd, and then a great multitude of People, whom they discover'd, but were not convicted of being Incendiaries, so much as they were run down by the Hatred that all Men bore against them. It appears from hence that Tacitus, tho a Man of Sense, was not at the pains to know what Christianity was, of which he speaks after a most absurd manner. 'Tis a shameful Effect of his Negligence, as I have observ'd elsewhere, and perhaps of the Roman Vanity, which despis'd every thing, except the Learning of the Grecians. But two things may be observ'd in*

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those Words: One is the Truth of the Fact, which the Evangelists teach us, that there was one *Jesus* in the Time of *Tiberius*, who was look'd upon as the *Christ* or *Messiah*, whom *Pontius Pilate* put to Death: The other is, that the Christians were not found guilty of the Fire of *Rome*, and could not be put to Death, as *Tacitus* believes, but upon that Accusation which concern'd also the Jews, viz. *That they were Enemies to Mankind*. The Interpreters of † *Tacitus* have shew'd that that Historian confounded the Jews with the Christians. As it was but too true that the Jews were Enemies to other Men, so nothing can be more absurd than to accuse the Christians of it, who had drawn on themselves the Hatred of the Jews, by maintaining that all Men are Brethren, and freely conversing with all Nations.

† See Lip-
sius upon
this Place.

|| Ep. lib.
10. Ep. 97.

We have also the Testimony of another contemporary Author, and a Friend of *Tacitus*, but who was somewhat more careful to know the Opinions of the Christians. 'Tis || *Pliny* the younger, who being Proconsul of *Bithynia*, about seventy Years after *Pontius Pilate* was Governour of *Judea*, search'd out, by *Trajan's* Orders, the Christians who were in his Province, and would know what Opinions they had. Afterwards he wrote to *Trajan* about it, in a Letter, which is extant still: *They affirm'd, says he, that all their Crime*

Crime and Error consisted in their using to meet at Night, on a certain day, and sing together a Hymn to CHRIST as to a GOD; that they bound themselves by an Oath indeed not to perpetrate any Crime, but to commit no Theft, nor Robbery, nor Adultery, to deceive no body, to deny no Trust: afterwards they went to eat together, which they did in common, without any harm; but that they had left off doing it after my Edict, whereby, according to your Orders, I had forbidden all sorts of Fraternities. Wherefore I thought it was necessary to extort the Truth by Torments from two Maids who were said to be Deaconesses: But I have only found a strange and excessive Superstition. Pliny as well as Tacitus calls Superstition some Opinions contrary to those of the Romans, according to the Custom of that time.

Two such Witnesses can't be rejected, who certainly favour'd not the Christians, and the first whereof acknowledges some Facts that were known to every body: and the other relates what he knew from two Christian Women whom he put to the Rack. The Writings we have of the Christians who liv'd from the time of *Pontius Pilate* to *Trajan's*, tell us also the same things. They refer the beginning of Christianity to that CHRIST whom *Pilate* put to Death; and they say, that they had precisely the same Morals. This we see not only in the Writings of the Apo-

stles and Evangelists, but also in the Letter of St. *Barnabas*, in that of St. *Clemens*, in the Books of *Hermas*, and the genuine Epistles of St. *Ignatius* and St. *Polycarp*.

5. It must therefore be granted, that under the Empire of *Tiberius* there was a Man in *Judea* who gave a beginning to the Christian Religion, and preach'd most excellent Morals. All the Christians who liv'd since attest it from Age to Age, and no body did ever doubt of it; the Heathens themselves don't deny it.

To be certain whether the Apostles and other Primitive Christians were sincere Persons, or whether there was any Reason to suspect their Honesty, let us see what sort of Men they were. Let us examine the Letter which St. *Clemens*, Bishop of the Church of *Rome*, wrote to that of *Corinth* about forty Years after the Death of Christ, or in the beginning of the Empire of *Vespasian*. We see in that whole Epistle a Spirit of Peace, Charity, Humility, and very pressing Exhortations to obey the Morals of the Gospel. He severely chides those who observe them not, and praises the *Corinthians* for having conform'd their Actions to its Precepts during some time. One may see the beginning of his Epistle, wherein he bears witness * to the Christians of *Corinth*; That they had labour'd Day and Night for all the Brethren, that the number of the Elect of God might be preserv'd with Mercy

* §. 2.

Mercy and Conscience ; that they had been sincere, without Malice, and without remembering the Harm they might have done one to another ; that all Divisions and Schisms were abhorr'd by them ; that they were sorrowful for the Faults of their Neighbours ; that they look'd upon their Wants as their own ; that they never repented of having done well, but were always ready to do all manner of good Works ; that in their Conduct full of Vertue and worthy of Respect, they did every thing in the Fear of God, whose Commands were written in their Hearts. Nay, he says towards the end, that he knew many Christians who put themselves in Chains to redeem others ; and that many having sold themselves to be Slaves, had sed others with the Price of their own Liberty. His whole Letter is full of the like Expressions.

That *Clemens* had for his Masters the Apostles of *JESUS OF NAZARETH*, who first taught Christianity, and he bears them witness of a great Piety. If we read their Writings, we shall find nothing in them but what breathes a great Respect for the Deity, an extreme Love to all Men, and an extraordinary Modesty in whatever relates to a Man's Behaviour towards himself. Let any of these Writings be pitch'd upon, nothing will be found in it but what tends to Piety and Charity. If some of their Writings have been controverted, let us take those that were never

doubted of; or, if you please, those which were quoted by St. *Clemens*, St. *Luke's* Gospel, and the first Epistle of St. *Paul* to the *Corinthians*; and we shall find in them the same Morals, which they endeavour to infuse into the Minds of their Disciples.

6. The Apostles therefore, by exhorting all those that would hear them, to live after a manner so rational and so advantageous to human Society, could not be suspected thereby of want of Sincerity. But it will perhaps be said, that they preach'd that Doctrine only to insinuate themselves into the Minds of the People; and then under pretence of Piety to obtain from them what they desir'd. But it must be granted me, that this is a mere Suspicion, not at all grounded upon the Doctrine they taught, seeing they condemn alike the unlawful Love of Riches, Dignities and Pleasures, and all sorts of Fraud and Cheat. Not one Place of their Writings can be quoted that favours Ambition, Covetousness, or Voluptuousness.

This being so, that Suspicion can be grounded but upon one of these two things, *viz.* either that the Apostles could expect some Advantage by their Doctrine, if it were generally embrac'd, or that they actually got some by it, as soon as they began to preach it. I call *Advantage* a Good greater in it self than all the Toils
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and Dangers which the Apostles expos'd themselves to by preaching the Gospel, or at least which they thought to be greater. 'Tis not likely, that if they were Deceivers, they would not propose to themselves a greater Advantage than the Trouble they were at. Otherwise we should look upon them as mad Men, which can't be suppos'd without Extravagancy, by those who have read their Writings.

But the Apostles could not expect any Advantage from their Doctrine, but on supposition that most of those to whom they preach'd it would embrace it. Otherwise they could expect but a perpetual Persecution; for none but a mad Man would have expected to live quietly among Men extremely conceited of some Opinions contrary to those he professes, who think themselves oblig'd both for the Good of the State, and the Interest of their Religion, to take away the Estates and Lives of those who oppose their Superstitions, such as were generally the *Romans, Grecians* and *Jews*, in the time of the Apostles.

They expected then that their Preaching would be so successful as to work upon the greatest part of Mankind? But this they could not expect, if they were never so little acquainted with the State wherein those Nations subject to the Roman Empire then were. The Jews were

* See Josephus in the History of that time.

|| Vid. Salust. in Bel. Catilin. Senecam Ep. 7. Quæst. Nat. lib. 4. Præfat. & passim Juvenal. Perissium, &c.

so addicted to their Traditions and Ceremonies, and besides so * corrupt in their Manners, that there was no likelihood of freeing them from their Prejudices and Vices. The Romans and Grecians were either Atheists or superstitious; and generally so given to their Pleasures, so covetous and ambitious, that the small number of those who had not lost all Sense || of Vertue, speak with Horror and Detestation of the Manners of their Time. The History of both represents to us, in the Events of that time, an Image of the most horrible Corruption that ever was, if we judg of it according to the Gospel-Notions. After what has been said, can any Man fancy that the Apostles hop'd to get their Opinions embrac'd by most of those who liv'd in their time? How could they expect that Men so blinded by their Passions, and hardn'd in their Crimes, would ever embrace Opinions that are altogether contrary to them? Indeed the Apostles openly said after their Master, that they expected not a great number of Men would receive their Doctrine, in proportion to those who should remain in their Unbelief.

But supposing the Apostles Simplicity had made them hope to convert the greatest Part of the Roman Empire, Experience would have soon undeceiv'd them, seeing after having preach'd during many Years,

Years, they were oblig'd to acknowledg, that they had converted but few People. The Roman History plainly teaches us, that during three hundred Years after the Beginning of Christianity, the number of Christians was far less than that of Heathens in the Roman Empire. Thus the Apostles were necessarily expos'd to a cruel Persecution during their whole Life. Being despis'd and hated by the Jews and Heathens alike, they could have no Reward that might be compar'd with their Labours, and the Dangers they were in every Minute. Hence it is that they * themselves say they expected all sorts of * 1 Cor. Misery in this Life. They were not mis- 15. 19. taken, seeing after an infinite number of Sufferings they were cruelly put to Death, maintaining still the Truth of the Doctrine they had preach'd. † 'Tis out of an unjust † s. s. Envy, says Clemens, whom I have cited already, that Peter suffer'd not one or two, but several Pains; and having undergone Martyrdom, is gone into the Place of Glory, which was due to him. 'Tis out of Envy that Paul got the Price of Patience. Having been put seven times in Irons, whipt and ston'd; being the Herald of the Gospel in the East and West, he made his Faith famous. Having taught the whole World Justice, and being come to the Extremity of the West, when he had suffer'd Martyrdom before the Chief of the State, he went out of the World.

That

* See
I Cor. I.
26.

† I Cor.
4. II.

|| Ib. c. 15.
19.

† Ib. c. 4.
9.

That Event of the Apostles Preaching destroys altogether the second thing on which the Suspicion of their want of Sincerity might have been grounded. If they were esteem'd by a small number of Men, * most of them of a low Condition, they were despis'd by the rest of Men, Jews and Heathens; ill-treated and persecuted, suffer'd an extreme Poverty, and at last died by the Hands of publick Executioners, as I have shew'd by *Clemens's* Words, and as all their other Disciples affirm it. One of the Apostles teaches us the same thing, when he says in one of his Epistles; † *Unto this present Hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain Dwelling-place: and labour, working with our own Hands.* || *If in this Life only we have Hope, we are of all Men most miserable.*

Certainly no Man of Sense would become the Execration of most Men, by maintaining a Forgery, to be esteem'd by some few who have no Credit or Reputation, nor would he be † *dealt with as those that were appointed to Death in the Amphitheaters*, to be a Spectate to the People. A Man may be mov'd with the Desire of Glory, when he considers that most of those among whom he lives will applaud him; but no body ever thought fit to expose himself to Long-sufferings, and at last to a cruel and shameful Death, only
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to be esteem'd by very few Men, and be look'd upon as an impious or mad Man by the greatest part of those among whom he liv'd.

7. The Truth of those Facts can't be deni'd, *viz.* that the Apostles have preach'd the Doctrine we read in their Books (which Christians profess still) under the Empire of *Tiberius*, and some following Emperors; that they liv'd in Sorrows and Afflictions; and at last some of them were put to a cruel Death, maintaining the Doctrine they taught during many Years.

If we suspected that the Apostles liv'd after a voluptuous manner, and altogether contrary to the Morals they preach'd, we should doubt of the Testimony of their first Disciples, who in imitation of their Masters, as they themselves say, have courageously expos'd themselves to an infinite number of Sufferings, without getting any Advantage by it in this Life.

* *To those Men, says Clemens, speaking of* §. 6.
St. Peter and St. Paul, who liv'd after a divine manner, a great multitude of the Elect were join'd, who having undergone several Torments, were a most noble Example amongst us. It would be one of the greatest Absurdities to say that the Apostles preaching that Men must suffer for Religion, exhorting them to the Practice of all manner of Vertues, and yet living at ease, with-

without caring to practise the Precepts they gave to others; but as far as it might serve to cheat the World, made a great number of Disciples, not only sincere Imitators of the seeming Vertues of their Masters, but ready to die, and who really died for a Doctrine, for which those of whom they learn'd it would suffer nothing.

One may easily conceive that some seduc'd Persons may be as strongly perswaded of a Lie, as we are of the most evident Truths, and do consequently, to maintain a Falshood, whatever the most resolute Men can do for the most important Truths. But one can't apprehend that Men who have imbib'd from their Childhood some Opinions altogether contrary to those of the Apostles, suffer'd themselves to be seduc'd; so that after they embrac'd their Doctrine, they suffer'd the most cruel Torments for it, tho they never saw their Masters suffer any thing for it. But it appears from the Passage I have quoted out of *Tacitus*, that in the beginning of Christianity a great many People declar'd themselves Christians, tho they saw that the publick Profession of the Christian Religion should expose them to the Punishments inflicted upon Incendiaries. It appears also from *Pliny*, that some Christian Women suffer'd to be put to the rack for their Christianity,

ty, without accusing the Christians of any thing. From whence it necessarily follows, that some of the first Preachers of the Gospel gave an Example to others, as their Disciples affirm it. One can't apprehend otherwise how they could get their Doctrine receiv'd by so many People, who suffer'd horrible Torments for the Religion they learn'd of them.

From what has been said I only draw this Consequence, *viz.* that the Apostles were sincere Men, as well as those, who, following their Example, died for the same Doctrine. The Apostles having been therefore undeniably sincere Men, it must be further confess'd, that if there ever were any Men whose Vertue deserv'd our Esteem, they are they. One can't think of a Design more useful to Mankind than theirs, as I have shew'd already, speaking of the Morals they preach'd. No body could endeavour to make it succeed with greater Zeal and Ardour, than they who sacrific'd to it their Repose, Pleasures, Estates, hopes of raising themselves, Honour, and Life it self.

Now I ask, whether being convinc'd of the Probity and Sincerity of the Apostles, and knowing besides from their Discourses that they were far from being mad Men, we may justly refuse to believe their Testimony, when they affirm they have seen some Facts which they relate with a vast
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number of Circumstances, and heard some Discourses which they set down from the beginning to the end, and which are full of Sense? Let every one put the Question to himself, whether he would not believe a Friend of his, whom he knew to be a sincere and judicious Man, if he affirm'd he had heard and seen several things which he relates, without having any Interest to deceive him? Could he look upon the Testimony of a Man of Sense, who should give all imaginable Marks of Sincerity, as a Lie, if he affirm'd he had heard a Friend of his say something, and afterwards had been present at his Torments and Death? I confess that those who knew not his Sincerity and Judgment, and that he had no Interest to tell a Lie, might doubt of what they should hear him say; but I affirm, that being perswaded of his Honesty and Wisdom, it were impossible not to believe him. Every one may be convinc'd of it by his Experience, and may imagin a thousand Examples of what I said.

The Apostles tell us they liv'd some Years with JESUS of *Nazareth*, of whom they learn'd all their Doctrine; that they saw him crucifi'd on such a day, giving up the Ghost upon the Cross, and afterwards buri'd in a Sepulcher digg'd in a Rock by a Jewish Counsellor, whose Name was *Joseph of Arimathea*, who obtain'd
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from *Pilate* leave to bury *Jesus*, and who having put him in a Sepulcher, caus'd a great Stone to be roll'd at the Entrance; that they saw some Roman Souldiers guard that Sepulcher, which the Chief of the Jews had seal'd, lest the Body of *Jesus* should be taken away. Can we, being perswaded, as we are, of the Sincerity of the Apostles, and having so strong Proofs of it, refuse to believe them in this? Certainly we should be out of our Wits, did we believe that wise and sincere Men would tell a Lie, when they affirm a Fact of that Nature with so many Circumstances. We cannot forbear having the same Thoughts concerning the Discourses of *Jesus*, which the same Apostles relate with so many Circumstances, that we could not relate them better, if we had heard them. 'Tis as clear as the Noon-light to those who are perswaded that the Apostles were Men who had at least common Sense and Honesty, that they said Truth concerning the Facts I have mention'd.

9. This being so, we can have no good Reason not to believe them when they affirm they have often seen their Master heal in a moment incurable Diseases, restore dead Men to Life, and himself rais'd at last, after he had been above thirty Hours in his Sepulchre, and then speaking and eating with them during many Days, and at last ascending to Heaven in

a Cloud, in their Presence. I know that several Men, who perhaps had never doubted of the Truth of the Apostles Testimony, if they had said nothing of the Miracles, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, doubt of it only for that Reason. They could have easily believ'd that a Man nam'd JESUS taught the Morals we find in the Gospel in *Judea*, when *Pontius Pilate* was Governour of it, and that the Jews oblig'd the Roman Governour to put him to Death out of Envy and Malice; and that his Disciples went on after his Death and taught his Doctrine, and that the most cruel Torments could not hinder them from preaching it. They would praise the whole Doctrine of Christ as the most excellent Philosophy that ever was taught among Men, and which contains the best Principles that can be thought of, to oblige them to live well one with another. But they perswade themselves, that the Apostles were Impostors, only because they say they saw their Master work Miracles, that he was seen by them after their Resurrection, and ascended into Heaven in their sight. Let's see why they do so.

The Falsity of a History can be known but two ways. First, when we perceive that the Witnesses who relate it were deceiv'd themselves, or design'd to deceive others, tho what they relate be very possible.

ble. Secondly, when we know by clear and evident Arguments that the Facts in question are absolutely impossible in themselves.

I have clearly shew'd that the Apostles design'd not to deceive others, and it can't be said that they themselves were always deceiv'd in all the Miracles they relate. If the Question was about a small number of Miracles, difficult to examin, one might have such a Suspicion with some likelihood; but they relate so many, and of so many sorts, that if what they say be not true, they must necessarily have been Deceivers. For example, they could not be impos'd upon by Christ's Ascension into Heaven, which they constantly preach'd, and of which the Christians made from the beginning one of the chief Articles of their Faith. Those who, as *Pliny* relates it, sung Hymns to *Christ* as to a God, believ'd without doubt that he ascended into Heaven. If we read only St. *Luke's*

* Gospel, and the first Epistle of St. *Paul* * Luke 24.
to the *Corinthians*, which contain several 1 Cor. 15.

particular Circumstances of many Miracles of Christ, especially of his Resurrection, and his several Apparitions after he came out of his Grave, we may certainly know that those who spoke so, were not seduc'd; and that if what they say is not true, they must necessarily have design'd to deceive those to whom they re-

lated such Facts. But I have undeniably shew'd, that the Apostles were sincere Men, and consequently that their Testimony can't be rejected.

Wherefore those who believe it not, accuse them not of having suffer'd themselves to be seduc'd, neither do they undertake to overthrow the Arguments by which we prove the Apostles Sincerity. They are contented to offer some Objections concerning the Nature of Miracles, and so confine themselves to the second way of knowing the Falsity of a Fact, which consists in discovering that 'tis a thing absolutely impossible.

But I shall speak of this in another Letter, wherein I shall explain the Nature of Miracles. I am,

SIR,

Yours.

LET.

LETTER II.

*Wherein is shew'd what a Miracle is,
and that we ought to conclude from
those of Christ and his Apostles,
that they were truly sent of God.*

I. **S**IR, I promis'd you to discourse of the Nature of Miracles, and I must perform my Promise, seeing without it I should but half prove the Truth of the Christian Religion. 'Tis not enough to believe that the general Doctrines of Christianity are true and agreeable to Reason; we must be also perswaded that they are of Divine Revelation, and this we learn from the Miracles of those who first preach'd them. That is the *Seal* whereby we clearly discover the Truth of the Christian Religion. To shew that it was reveal'd by the same God who made Heaven and Earth, and gave to Nature the Laws, according to which natural Causes act; they have often desir'd him to suspend the Effects of those Laws, tho unavoidable; at their Prayers they were suspended, and the contrary of what the Experience of all

Ages had observ'd hitherto, and of what we still see, happen'd then. That's an undeniable Proof, not only of their Doctrines being agreeable to the Will and Designs of the Maker of all Things, as it seems to be if it be merely consider'd in it self, but also of their having an expresse Order from God to publish it among Men.

Wherefore I'll shew first, what a Miracle is, and how true Miracles may be distinguish'd from false ones. Secondly, I'll enquire into the Author of them, and what Consequence may be drawn from them. Lastly, I shall say something concerning the Extent of Miracles, and their different kinds. I'll shew at the same time the Truth of the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles, and I shall answer some Objections of Unbelievers.

2. To look upon an extraordinary Effect as a Miracle, and draw any Consequences from it; First, it must be a thing above the Power of Men. Secondly, it ought to be above the ordinary Course of Nature, or corporeal Causes; and above the Strength of humane Souls; for *Nature*, or *natural Causes*, and the *Order* or *the Laws of Nature*, are nothing but the Souls and Bodies of Men, other Bodies, and the Laws according to which they constantly act, without being able to violate them. Thirdly, he in whose Behalf
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that thing is done, ought to know it before-hand, or at least it must happen when he wants it. I shall examin those three things one after another; for the whole Strength of the Proofs which can be fetch'd from Miracles depends upon it.

3. There are some Divines who maintain that a Miracle is only the Effect of an infinite Power, and consequently that God only is the Author of it; so that it is not only above the Power of Men, but also above that of all other Creatures. I shall speak of that hereafter. 'Tis enough to observe here, that nothing which Men are able to do, can be look'd upon as a miraculous thing. Wherefore to be sure whether what is vented as a Miracle is really so, the first thing that is to be consider'd, is, whether Men can do it. For if it appears that it is not above the Power of Men, there would be no reason to believe that it is an extraordinary Effect of God's Power, or of some other intelligent Being.

Thus if a Man shew'd an usual Skill in Swimming, and boasted of it as of a miraculous thing, he might be justly accounted an Impostor, because one may by Use get a Skill in Swimming, which seems wonderful to those who have it not. But if any body walk'd upon the Water as upon the Land, without sinking in the least, it could not be doubted that he did a thing

which is above all the Strength and Skill of Men, provided he had nothing under his Feet that might be seen, or elsewhere, to uphold him. Every one knows that there being a certain Relation of *Gravity* between humane Bodies and Water, the Laws of Nature allow not that a Man should stand upon the Water. So that if it appears that any body walk'd upon the Water as upon the Land, without having under his Feet, or elsewhere, any thing to hold him so, it must be granted that a Power greater than that of Men acted in his behalf.

4. But because there are an infinite number of natural Causes which Men make use of to produce some Effects, which they themselves cannot produce by their mere Skill and Strength ; a thing, to be look'd upon as miraculous, ought not to be done by any other natural Cause, such as are the Bodies which surround us. For example, great Weights, which would presently sink if they were thrown into the Water, will lie upon it without sinking, if a Body much lighter than Water, as Wood, be put between the Water and those Weights. There is nothing miraculous in that, because it is done by a corporeal and known Cause. But it could not be deni'd to be a miraculous thing, if a Man should walk upon the Water as I have said.

When

When a learned Physician cures a sick Person with some Remedies, after he has spent a long time in studying the Nature of Diseases, and the Effects of Remedies, that Cure is not look'd upon as a Miracle; 'tis ascrib'd to the natural Effect of the Remedies which have been well appli'd. But if we should see a Man, who only by touching all sorts of sick Persons, or by speaking to them, without using any sensible Remedy, cures them upon the spot, that Effect could be ascrib'd only to some supernatural Causes.

Some * Unbelievers have endeavour'd * Spinoza
to make that Character of Miracles uncer- in Tract.
tain, by saying that we know not so per- Theologi-
fectly natural Causes and their Effects, as co-Polit-
to be able to distinguish what they can cap. 6.
produce, from what is above their
Strength. Nay, they pretend that what
is call'd Miraculous should only be look'd
upon as an extraordinary or rare Acci-
dent, and the Effect of natural Causes,
which were not well known. But tho it
be very true, that we are very far from
having a perfect Knowledg of natural
Causes, yet it is not less certain that we
know most certainly some things by Ex-
perience, especially when that Experience
is common and easy. For example, we
perfectly know that no Man can stand up-
on the Water so as to touch it only with
the Sole of his Feet, without using the
X 4 help

help of any other Body for it. If any one should say that it may be such a thing happen'd sometimes by an extraordinary Effect of some natural Causes which we know not; it is certain that such a Conjecture could only be heard as a Proposition which is not contradictory, but is not the less false for that, as the Experience of all Mankind teaches us. Indeed those who use that Argument to make Miracles doubtful, do it only to perplex simple Men who hear them. They know very well that we are perfectly sure of some things, and that they can't be made doubtful, by saying only that 'tis not contradictory that the contrary be true. If they durst deny the miraculous Effects on which Religion is grounded, they would roundly do it, and not have recourse to Objections so little judicious; but not daring to do it, and being not able to make the contrary of what we believe look probable, they confine themselves to some such Objections. I shall not undertake now to confute all their particular Objections, because the Principles I lay down destroy them.

5. 'Tis therefore certain that we may know some things are above the Power of Men, and can't be the Effect of any other natural or corporeal Cause; and that if we see some happen, or learn from faithful Witnesses that there happen'd some, we
may

may say, without being mistaken, that they are miraculous things. Such is, for example, the Action of walking upon the Water, and curing all manner of Diseases without Remedies.

However, to draw any Consequences from a miraculous Fact in the behalf of any body, he ought to know before-hand that that Miracle will happen; or at least it must happen just when 'tis necessary, for otherwise it would be insignificant. If when no body thinks of it there happen'd a thing wherein neither Men nor other natural Causes had a hand, and no body knew of what use it would be, nothing could be concluded from it; and he who should say that it happen'd in his behalf, ought to be suspected of Fraud.

Some * Historians, for instance, tell us * *See my Dissertation De Trajectu maris Idumæi.* that *Alexander* going to meet *Darius*, led part of his Troops to pass at the foot of Mount *Climax*, where there was no Passage when the South Wind blew, because the Sea cover'd that way; and that as soon as he came thither the North blew, so that they went through it. Not to say the Change of Wind at that time might be natural, I affirm that *Alexander* having not known it before, and being able to go another way, it can't be look'd upon as a Miracle, which Providence wrought in his behalf; nor can it be concluded from it, that Heaven approv'd his Designs.

To

* Vid. Q.
Curt. lib.
10. c. 10.

To give another Example fetch'd from the History of the same Prince, * 'tis said that his Corps remain'd seven Days at *Babylon* before it was embalm'd, without smelling ill in the least ; nor had his Face a different Colour than what it had whilst he was alive, tho it be extremely hot in that Climate wherein *Babylon* was situated. Let us suppose not only the Truth of that Fact, but also that natural Causes had no hand in it ; 'tis manifest that nothing can be concluded from such a thing either for or against *Alexander*. For indeed what could the invisible Power mean by preserving the Body of *Alexander* from Corruption during seven Days ? None but that Power can teach it ; and if any one had undertaken to make his advantage of it, he had been justly laugh'd at.

That Character of a true Miracle altogether destroys the Objection I have confuted already : for if miraculous Facts were extraordinary Effects of natural but unknown Causes, 'tis manifest they could not be foreseen. No Man can foresee a thing which scarce ever happens, and is the Effect of some Causes which are unknown to him, unless that Man be warn'd of it by an Effect of the same Causes, which is to suppose without reason a thing altogether incomprehensible.

6. Wherefore if we can shew that there happen'd some things that neither Men
nor

nor other natural Causes could do, which notwithstanding were foretold by those in whose behalf they were done; it must be granted us, that they are miraculous Facts which happen'd in the behalf of those who foretold them. The Gospels are full of the like Miracles, but I shall only pitch upon one, to apply what has been said to it. It is of so great moment, that if it be granted that 'tis true, the rest can't be deni'd. I mean *the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, wherein we see all the Characters of a true Miracle. First, 'tis certain by the Experience of all Ages, that no Man, or any other natural Cause, can restore a dead Man to Life. Tho the humane Body is not perfectly known to us, no more than the Virtue of an infinite number of things, yet we may affirm without Rashness, that no body raises himself, nor by his own Virtue, or that of any other thing. One can't affirm the contrary without being look'd upon as a mad Man among all the Nations in the World. Secondly, Jesus Christ * often * Mat. 16, foretold his Resurrection, and said it 21. & 17, should happen on the third Day. He con- 23. & 26. cluded from thence before-hand, that Men 61. & 27, would be oblig'd to believe that he was 63. sent by God, his Resurrection being the greatest Sign of it that could be ask'd.

† *An evil and adulterous Generation*, said † Mat. 12: he, *seeks after a Sign, and there shall no* 39, 40.

Sign

Sign be given to it, but the Sign of the Prophet Jonas ; for as Jonas was three Days and three Nights in the Whale's Belly, so shall the Son of Man be three Days and three Nights in the Heart of the Earth.

If the Apostles were sincere Men, and were not deceiv'd, that Fact is undeniable, and consequently it must be acknowledged that he who rais'd Jesus Christ, bare him a Testimony which can't be doubted of. I have shew'd in the foregoing Letter, that the Apostles were sincere Men, and could not be deceiv'd on that occasion. Their Master was not hid in a Chamber when it was said that he was dead ; 'twas upon a Cross, and in a publick Place, surrounded with Roman Souldiers. He had been buri'd, his Enemies seal'd his Sepulcher ; they set a Guard of Souldiers about it, and he was above four and twenty Hours in it. Therefore no body could doubt of his being truly dead, and his Apostles did not question it. Afterwards they saw him several times, touch'd him, spoke with him, and ate with him ; so that they could not be mistaken in it. Wherefore if the thing had not happen'd, it were not possible to vindicate their Sincerity ; and if they were sincere Men, which they certainly were, as has been shew'd, the Truth of the Fact cannot be doubted of.

7. The more we examin their Testimony, the more we shall be convinc'd of it; and without insisting longer upon that, I had rather observe, against those who acknowledg a God and a Providence, that what may be said of feign'd Miracles can't be objected against that Miracle and other Miracles of Christ, *viz.* that there is no great likelihood that God would disturb the Order of Nature for so inconsiderable Matters as those are for which he is said to disturb it every day. The Unbelievers who liv'd in the Apostles time, and had not attentively consider'd the Circumstances which attend the preaching of the Gospel, might perhaps have said then that they apprehended not how Providence was so much concern'd in the Establishment of Christianity, as to work an infinite number of Miracles in its behalf, seeing it made so little a Progress in the World. But those who live now can't raise the like Objections against us, having seen the Duration and Progress of the Christian Religion. If it has not produc'd yet among Men all the Effects it should have produc'd, if they had known their true Interest, it can't be said that such a thing will never happen hereafter. Those who would have conjectur'd at the beginning of Christianity, that it should always be a contemptible Sect, because it was then despis'd, would have been grossly mistaken,

mistaken, as we see at present ; and the Knowledg we have of the Time past ought to make us reserv'd with respect to the future.

8. Let us see now what is the efficient and immediate Cause of Miracles. We have seen already, that they are neither Men, nor other Bodies, which act according to the Order of Nature. It must be therefore some invisible Power, that is, either some intelligent Beings more excellent than we, tho they are created, or else God himself.

Some believe, as I said already, that Miracles are the Effects of an infinite Power ; and there is no doubt but God himself wrought several Miracles : but the Question is, whether they are all above the Strength of all other Creatures ; so that they have no other efficient and immediate Cause but God himself. To deny that intelligent Beings, more perfect than we are, can work Miracles, we should exactly know what is the Extent of their Power, and distinctly see that Miracles are above it. 'Tis true we know they are above the Laws of Nature, which God establish'd from the beginning ; but we know not whether he gives not to Angels the Power of altering sometimes that Order. Tho it be originally the Effect of an infinite Power, it follows not that none but an infinite Power can make some Alteration

teration in it, if the Power which establish'd it will permit it. We can't therefore say that Angels work no Miracles; in effect it appears from sacred History that God often made use of them when Miracles were wrought. But I will not insist upon it, because it belongs not to my Subject.

9. It will perhaps be ask'd, supposing Angels work Miracles; First, how one may know whether 'tis God or an Angel that wrought a certain Miracle. And, Secondly, how one may know that a Miracle was done by a good or bad Angel.

A Miracle being not of a Nature which necessarily requires a Cause, whereof the Power is infinite, I confess we see no Character in it, if it be consider'd in it self, whereby we may know whether it was wrought by God or an Angel. But the more we see a thing above our Power, the more it seems difficult to us, and the more we persuade our selves that 'tis the Effect of an infinite Power. For example, to foretel a contingent Event, or depending upon Mens Will, and which is to happen many Ages after, seems to us to be a thing above the Knowledg of created intelligent Beings, tho it be never so great. But the raising of a Storm, tho the Air is not dispos'd for it, seems not to be a very difficult thing, tho it be above our Power; and we easily believe that
Angels

Angels either good or bad can do it. However it matters little to know whether God immediately wrought a Miracle, or a good Angel, seeing 'tis certain good Angels do nothing but what is agreeable to the Will of God, or is an execution of his Orders. Whether God himself acts, or an Angel, 'tis the same thing with respect to us, seeing we neither see the Cause that works, nor the manner of its Operation.

As for the other Question concerning the manner of knowing whether a Miracle was wrought by a good or a bad Angel, one may say something more positive. Truth being always the same contradicts not it self; 'tis a manifest Principle to all those who are not *Pyrrhonians*. Wherefore the Miracles of God and good Angels ought always to tend to the confirming or establishing some Doctrines agreeable to Truths, that are known either by Revelation or Reason, seeing 'tis certain that God and good Angels always love the Truth. If we see therefore that a Miracle confirms or establishes something contrary to a certain Truth, we may be sure that Miracle is an Effect of a Power contrary to that of God and good Angels. Thus the Design of a Miracle discovers its Author. If we can't apprehend what's the end of a Miracle, we can give no certain Judgment about it, nor draw

draw from it any Consequence for or against Truth.

A bad Angel being not able to work Miracles which favour Truth and Vertue, all those which contribute to it, ought to be look'd upon as coming from a good Principle. On the contrary, a good Angel being not able to act for Lies and Vices, all the Miracles which should favour either of them, ought to be look'd upon as Miracles of bad Angels. This is an infallible Rule to know by what sort of Angels a Miracle was wrought, supposing it were known that an Angel was the Author of it.

10. If the Miracles of the Gospel are examin'd according to those Principles, it cannot be deni'd that they were wrought either by God himself or good Angels, because their only Aim is to establish or settle Truth, and lead Men to Vertue. Now this is altogether inconsistent with the Notion one may form of a Power which delights in doing ill, and deceiving Men. This Christ shew'd to the Pharisees, who accus'd him of casting out Devils, by virtue of a Power he had receiv'd from the Prince of Demons. * E- * Mat. 12. every Kingdom, says he, divided against it self, is brought to Desolation; and every City or House divided against it self, shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his

Kingdom stand? That's a convincing Proof of the Divinity of the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles; against the Jews, who were so extravagant as to ascribe them to an ill Power, that was an Enemy to Vertue. But because I write not against them, I shall not longer insist upon it. The Unbelievers who live among Christians are not more perswaded of the Power of the Devil, than of God, and deny all sorts of Miracles alike. But I have shew'd, from the Sincerity of the Apostles, and the thing it self, that they have no reason to deny those of Christ.

II. Lastly; If it be consider'd that Miracles are the Effects of the Power of God or Angels, one may easily apprehend that they are not contradictory things. That which is *contradictory* is the Object of no Power, 'tis a mere Nothing, as all those who know the Meaning of that word will grant it. No positive Idea can be form'd of it, and every contradictory Proposition is unintelligible in it self. If the Miracles mention'd in Holy Scripture are examin'd, not one of that Nature will be found among them. There is none but what may be express'd in intelligible Propositions. For example, God can make a Man who liv'd to live no longer; that is, his Blood shall no more circulate, and all his Members shall cease to perform their Functions. On the contrary, he
can

can make a Man whose Blood was settl'd, and whose Members perform'd none of their Functions, to begin to live again, as it did before. Those Propositions are easily apprehended. But *to make a Man to live and not to live, at the same time*, taking the word *to live* in one and the same Sense, is a contradictory thing, which is not the Object of the Divine Power. God never wrought any such Miracles.

Those who rank among the Miracles of Christianity, that whereby they pretend that God makes a humane Body to be extended, and not extended at the same time, and to be in many Places at one time; those Men, I say, feign a Miracle, of which they have no Idea, and rest contented with Words they understand not. They ascribe to the Christian Religion a Mystery absurd, and contrary to the clearest Light of Reason and Revelation.

What I said concerning Miracles has no relation with that, and I pretend not to defend any such thing. My Design was to shew wherein Miracles consist, to make Unbelievers apprehend that they are very possible, that they can't be assaulted but by shewing that there is an Impossibility in the miraculous Facts on which the Christian Religion is grounded.

There is besides another sort of Miracles, which tho perhaps they happen every day, can't be of any use to prove the

Truth of the Christian Religion, because they are not sensible. God can very often do, either by himself or the Ministry of Angels, an infinite Number of things without the intervention of natural Causes, when he thinks fit, or good Men pray him to do it. But because one can't perceive whether a supernatural Cause acts or not on those occasions, because what happens is not in it self above the Strength of natural Causes, and 'tis not known whether they interven'd, it can't be affirm'd that a Miracle was wrought. For example, a sick Man whom Remedies could not naturally cure, is restor'd by the Prayers of his Relations, because God or Angels supply what is wanting in the natural Virtue of Remedies. But this can't be affirm'd without a Revelation.

Hereupon 'tis ask'd, How we come to suppose that God who works no more sensible Miracles, according to us, performs every day some invisible ones, such as that which I have describ'd; and why he should be desir'd to work this kind of Miracles, not those which strike our Senses? In answer to that I say, that we can know nothing of God's Conduct but by sensible Effects, or a Revelation. Wherefore seeing we see no more such Miracles as strike our Senses, we ought to say that God will work no more any such Miracles; and if we can give some Reasons of it, which are not

not unworthy of God's Wisdom, nothing can hinder us from alledging them, * as * Part II. I have done elsewhere. On the other ch. 6. hand, Revelation commanding us to offer Prayers to God in our Necessities, and assuring us that if what we ask is truly advantageous to us, if we ask it as we ought, and if we obey the Precepts of the Gospel, we shall obtain what we pray for; we have reason to suppose that God will interpose after an extraordinary manner, if it be necessary, to hear our Prayers, because he promis'd it. But why, will it be said, did God make such Promises, which suppose that he works still some Miracles of this latter sort, seeing he will no more do sensible ones? I have shew'd already, why he works no more Miracles, that fall under our Senses, and there is no need I should repeat what I have said about it. As for the other, they are a necessary Consequence of God's Providence, which consists not only in having given some Laws to Nature, according to which it acts; but in supplying the Defects of those Laws, and making such Exceptions to them as God thinks fit. Seeing therefore Providence exists not less now than it did formerly, no body ought to wonder that God works Miracles of that kind. There is nothing in it that's unworthy of him; and seeing he promis'd it, it can't be doubted whether he does it, and Men have

have reason to pray to him on that Supposition. It can't be said that 'tis an impossible thing, and prov'd thereby that our Prayers are useless.

I think I have undeniably shew'd it, by supposing that there is a God who made the World, and is consequently the Author of the Laws of Nature; and that there are some other intelligent Beings, who can do what is above the Power of Men. I prov'd the first thing in the last Chapter of the 2d Part of my Discourse concerning *Incredulity*; and the other can't be doubted of, if we acknowledg the Authority of Christ and his Apostles, confirm'd with undeniable Miracles.

Christ and his Apostles might have made their Doctrine to be admir'd with mere Reasonings, as we do now; but their Business was not only to shew that they said nothing but what was most agreeable to Reason; they taught not their Doctrine as mere Philosophers or Divines, but as Men authoriz'd by Heaven; they were therefore to convince Men that they were sent from God. To prove it undeniably, there was no better way than to do some things above the Laws of Nature, which were sensible Signs of God's approving their Doctrine, and whereby they undeniably prov'd that they were his Messengers. If they had done or said nothing but what other Men might have done or said,

said, they would have been look'd upon as Divines or Philosophers, who vented their own Thoughts; but when Men saw that after they had appeal'd to the Maker of the World for the Truth of what they said, that there happen'd at their Prayers some things which are above the Power of all Men and all natural Causes; they could not doubt but God declar'd himself in their behalf, especially if they consider'd that the Doctrine they preach'd was most worthy of him. So that the finest Doctrine that ever was, attended with unheard-of Miracles, ought to excite the Attention of all those who were not altogether blinded by their Vices and Prejudices, and make them look upon them as the true Ministers of that God, who created the World.

This is, Sir, what I had to say to you concerning Miracles; not to exhaust the Matter, but only to shew the Possibility and Truth of those of Christ and his Apostles. I heartily pray God, that it may contribute to reclaim those who out of Ignorance or otherwise doubt of the Truth of the Christian Religion. I am, &c.

FINIS.

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